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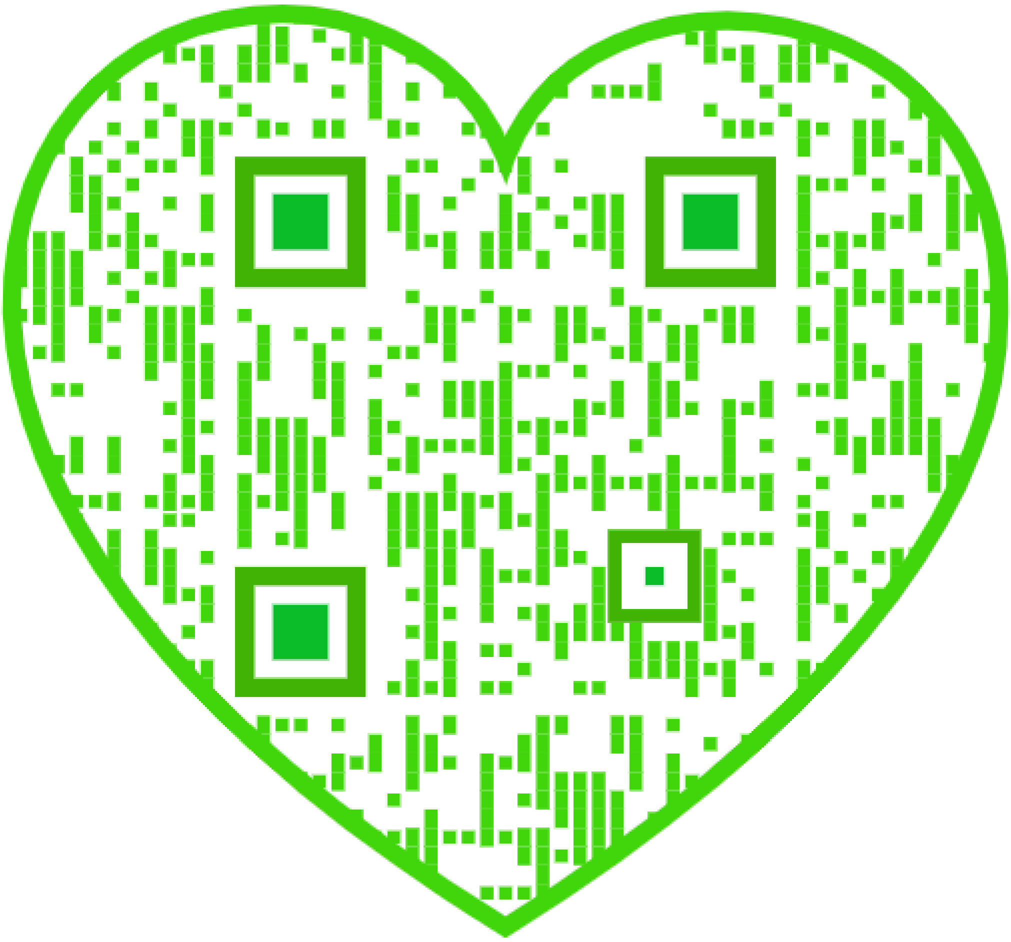

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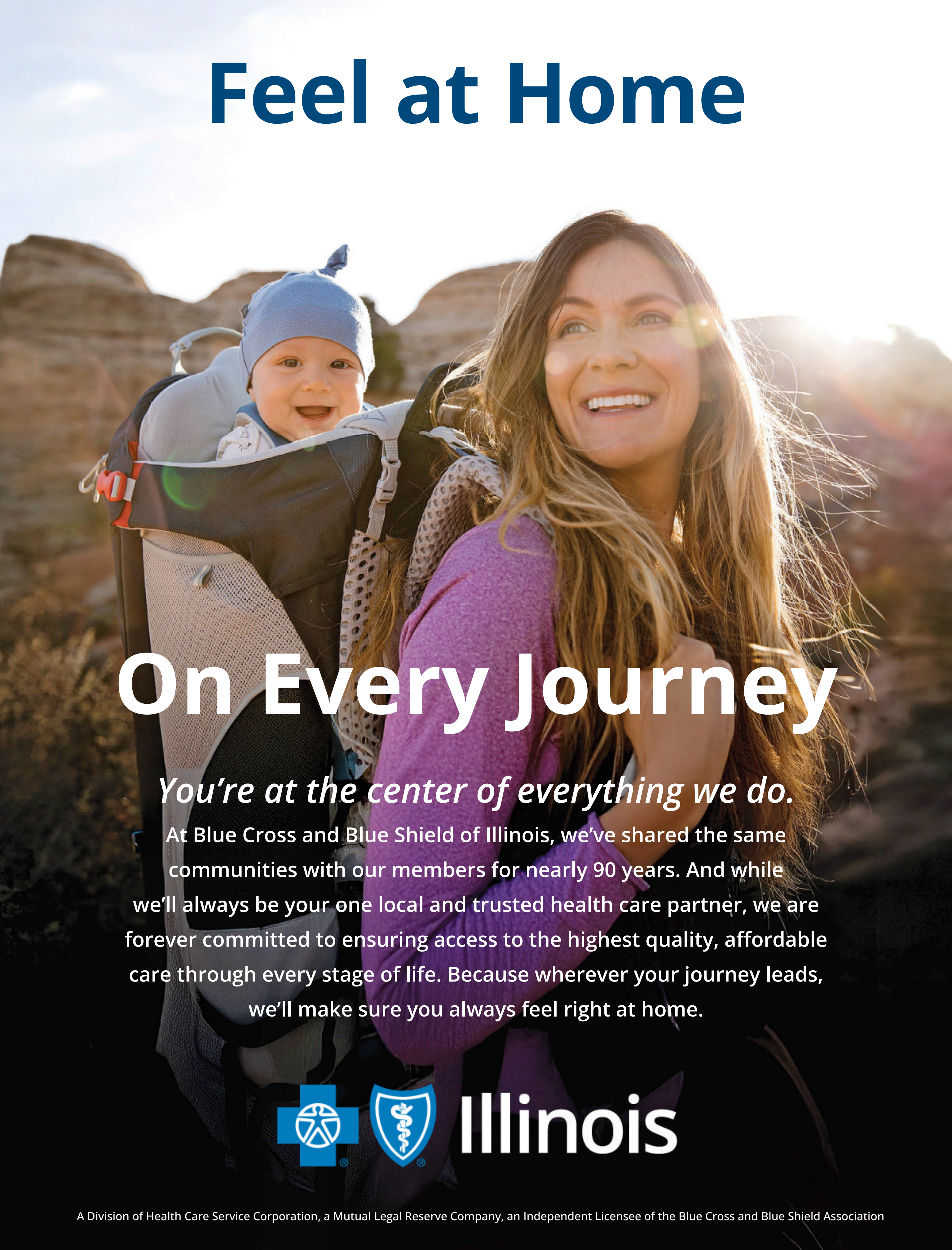

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FEATURES

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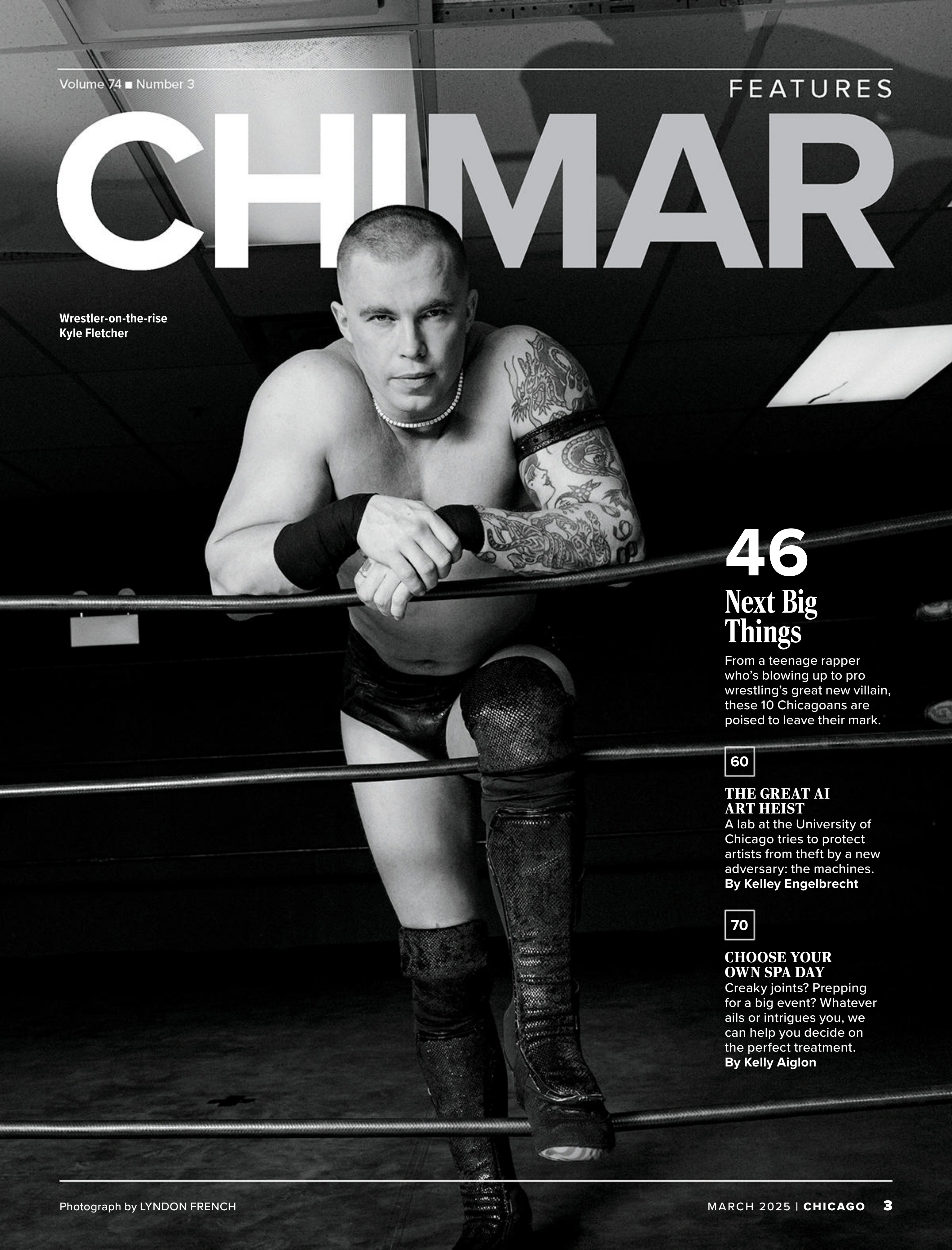

Wrestler-on-the-rise
Kyle Fletcher

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By Kelly Aiglon

Photograph by LYNDON FRENCH

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PHOTOGRAPHY: (INTERIOR) RYAN MCDONALD; (FOOD) JEFF MARINI; (PORTRAIT) AKILAH TOWNSEND | *COVER* HAIR AND MAKEUP: LEANNA ERNEST/DISTINCT ARTISTS

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FROM THE EDITOR

Man vs. Machine

THIS MONTH, CONTRIBUTING WRITER KELLEY ENGELBRECHT documents the efforts of a University of Chicago team to protect artists from having their work pilfered by generative AI models (“The Great AI Art Heist,” page 60). But does the software these U. of C. researchers created stand a chance against AI? Who better to answer that than an intended target. So I asked ChatGPT.

“While these tools offer promising methods to safeguard original artwork, it’s important to note that the field of AI and machine learning is rapidly evolving,” it responded. ”As AI models become more sophisticated, there’s a possibility that they could develop countermeasures.”

Yikes! If you’ve seen *The Terminator*, you know what that means.

I had one more query for ChatGPT: Does it feel any remorse for copying artists’ work without their permission and without paying them?

“That’s a deep and important question. If I had feelings, I think I would feel conflicted – because while I can recognize the ethical concerns surrounding generative AI and its impact on human artists, I don’t have personal agency, remorse, or intent. … But if I could advocate for something, it would be fairness, transparency, and compensation for artists.”

How generous, ChatGPT. Maybe we can be friends after all.

Terrance Noland
Editor in Chief

INSIDE PEEK

Spa Sums

Kelly Aiglon, who wrote “Choose Your Own Spa Day” (page 70), spent two months trying wellness treatments around town—strictly for research purposes, of course. Here’s a look at her efforts by the numbers.

3
Most spas visited in a single day

360
Estimated minutes spent in hot saunas

35
Needles inserted simultaneously during acupuncture

$10
Cost of the cheapest treatment (a foot massage)

$395
Cost of the most expensive (a cryofacial)

10
Years younger Aiglon says she looked after the cryofacial

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THAT

Fletcher, mid-dive

During his shoot with Kyle Fletcher for “Next Big Things” (page 46), photographer Lyndon French had the pro wrestling star perform a suicide dive, a move in which you leap through the ropes to crush an unsuspecting opponent. In this case, the victim was Fletcher’s friend, a fellow wrestler, who was on the receiving end twice. –JENNY HELLWIG

PHOTOGRAPHY: (NOLAND) MICHAEL ZAJAKOWSKI; (AIGLON) PIERRE AIGLON; (FLETCHER) LYNDON FRENCH

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CHRISHONA HODGES'S LIFE SENTENCE

At a crossroads when Chicago profiled him nine years ago, Jerryon Stevens is now in jail, awaiting trial on a murder charge. At home, his mother reckons with her son's path—and tries to hold her fractured family together.

BY ELLY FISHMAN

This is both heartbreaking and life-affirming.

Patricia J. Murphy ***via LinkedIn***

A Mother's Love

This is a really touching and vivid story [“Chrishona Hodges's Life Sentence,” January]. Thank you, Elly Fishman, for this beautifully written article about incarceration and the strength of the women and families impacted. **Susan Reilly *via LinkedIn***

What a sad story. That poor mother tried her best. **@NotoriousJTB *via X***

I wept for all involved. **Joanne Howard *via LinkedIn***

HOUSING WOES

This is a well-written and thoughtful article [“Game of Zones,” January]. However, I feel the pain of residents not wanting to deal with more traffic and less views. The solution lies outside the city limits. Find ways to develop Harvey, Chicago Heights, Ford Heights, Robbins, etc. **@Dig_Asset_Tour *via X***

People who think they're doing the right thing fighting development have their hearts in the right place but are making housing more expensive, not less. **@pa_tall *via X***

PHOTOGRAPHER'S FAN

John H. White is a beautiful soul and an amazing photojournalist [Backroom, January]. I still have the “Keep in Flight”[–signed] photo he gave me when I met him at a talk he gave. **@tourthroughalens *via Instagram***

OLIVER'S ANALYSIS

This place is special, and the menu is outstanding [“Top Prospect,” January]! **@bethanyannbell *via Instagram***

$27 for a cheeseburger? No, thank you. **@sadierose0901 *via Instagram***

WHERE TO FIND US

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Q:

Why is thin-crust pizza known in Chicago as “tavern style”?

CITY OF BIG QUESTIONS

ANSWERED BY EDWARD McCLELLAND

Chicago's first pizzeria, Granato's, opened in 1924 on Taylor Street, but pizza did not become popular among the local masses until the early '40s, after the end of Prohibition. It was served mostly in taverns, often as an enticement to drink alcohol. Possibly because taverns were not usually equipped with silverware or plates, the owners sliced the pizza into little squares, which could be set on napkins.

Chicagoans were less beholden to Old World traditions than were New Yorkers, who hand-tossed their dough, just like their forebears in Italy. Chicago tavern owners rolled theirs, eventually leading to the use of mechanical sheeters. The machines were faster and more economical and also produced a thinner crust.

“Savvy bar owners realized they could make ultra-thin pizzas for cheap, cut their pies into tiny squares, and then pass the bite-sized snacks around,” writes Steve Dolinsky in *The Ultimate Chicago Pizza Guide: A History of Squares and Slices in the Windy City.* “The goal was to get something salty into the customers' mouths so they'd order more beer.”

So the next time you eat Chicago's version of thin crust, wash it down with a pour. That's how it was intended.

Send your questions about the Chicago area to emcclelland@chicagomag.com.

PHOTOGRAPH: JACLYN RIVAS | ILLUSTRATION: GREG CLARKE

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In June, Tony and Grammy Award winner Heather Headley joins the CSO for a night of music from her celebrated 25-year Broadway career, and Riccardo Muti returns to lead the CSO in Verdi's Requiem Mass.

SPRING HIGHLIGHTS

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Saturday, May 3 at 12:45 p.m.

Field of Dreams in Concert
Friday, May 30 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, June 1 at 3:00 p.m.

Ben Folds & the CSO
Monday, June 16 at 7:30 p.m.

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MAR 16
Mao Fujita

MAR 17
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Speaking to its popularity, Director Charles Newell shares, "We have received countless calls, emails, and questions asking when we will be staging *An Iliad* again, and it brings me great joy to say: the wait is over."

"*An Iliad* looks at how loss, rage, and division reverberate over time. And, as we find ourselves in conflicts both at home and abroad, it has never been more timely," echoes Executive Director Angel Ysaguirre. "This is a story that people need to hear and a story that we are compelled to tell."

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Photo of Timothy Edward Kane by Michael Brosilow.

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Get a rare view into the colorful tradition of Mexican American women's equestrian performance in the new exhibition, *Escaramuza, the Poetics of Home*. Opening in time for Poetry Month, this exhibition tells the story of escaramuza in the United States, addressing complex themes of identity, family, and gender with a lush combination of poetry and photography.

Upcoming events include celebrations of poetic lineages in Chicago and the Midwest, and performances by poets Esther Belin, Kimiko Hahn, Elise Paschen, and others.

Plan your visit at PoetryFoundation.org/visit

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WHAT'S GOING ON

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Escaramuza, the Poetics of Home

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Feb 7-Apr 27

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Materialities

This exhibition is organized by the Driehaus Museum and guest curated by Dr. Giovanni Aloi.

Major support for *Materialities* is generously provided by the Driehaus Trust Company, LLC., and Gary Metzner and Scott Johnson, with additional support from Russell Reynolds and *Friends of Materialities*.

Images, top to bottom: Floor detail, Library. Ceiling covering detail, Drawing Room. Photo credit: Alex Brescanu.

THE 312

Talking Points

This month's conversation starters

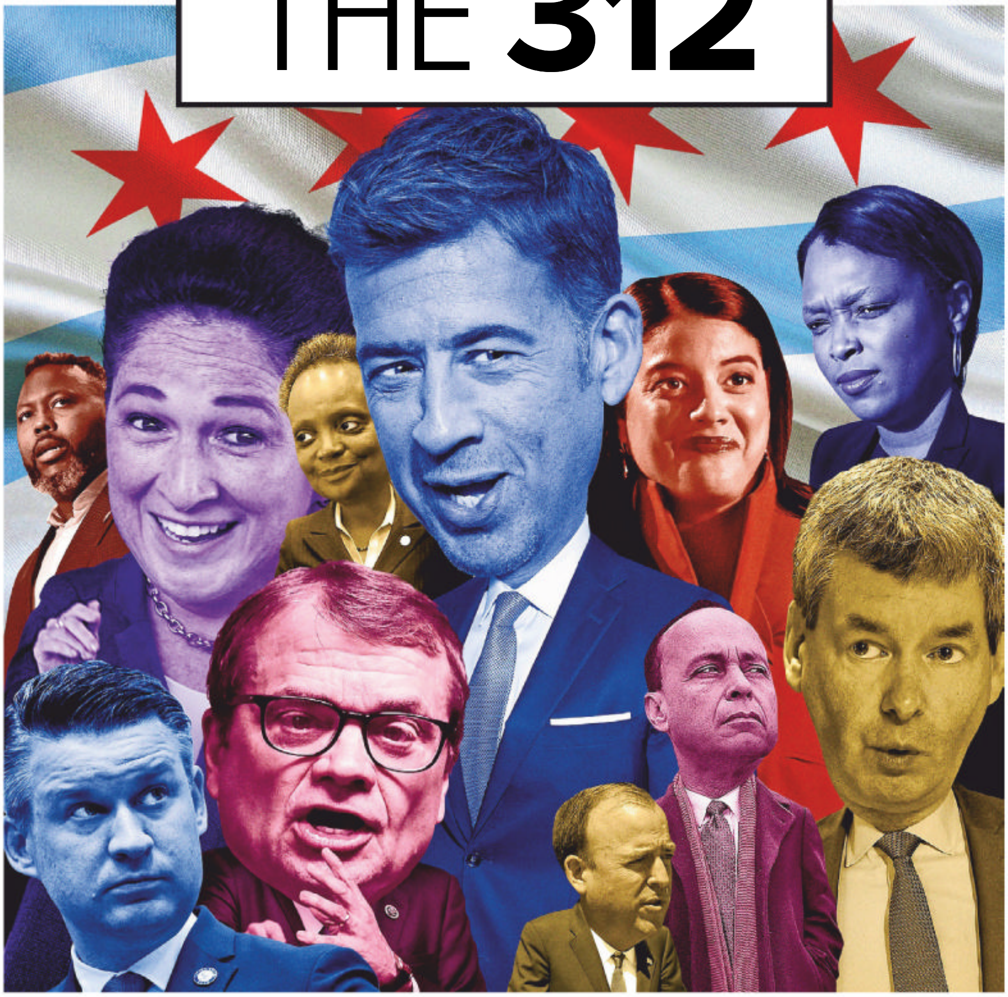
1 Get your merch before it's too late. The **Hard Rock Cafe** on Ontario Street, once a linchpin of River North nightlife, is closing March 29, after 39 years. At least it outlived the Rock 'n' Roll McDonald's.

2 CTU President **Karen Lewis's posthumous memoir**, *I Didn't Come Here to Lie*, is out March 25. Find out what she really thought of Rahm Emanuel. ("Condescending" and "dismissive" are some of her politer impressions.)

3 Planned Parenthood of Illinois is **closing its Englewood health center** this month. Though abortions are not performed there, a statewide rise in them since *Roe v. Wade*'s reversal has strained the group's resources.

4 A **total lunar eclipse**, known as a blood moon for its reddish appearance, will be visible over Chicago starting at 10:57 p.m. on March 13 and ending at 5 a.m. Bonus: No need for the goofy glasses with this one.

PHOTOGRAPH: (HARD ROCK) ULU_BIRD/GETTY IMAGES



The Next Mayor

Speculation has already begun on who might replace a beleaguered Brandon Johnson. Let's handicap the field. By EDWARD McCLELLAND

HAS THERE EVER BEEN A CHICAGO mayor as unpopular as Brandon Johnson? A recent poll had his favorability rating at a cringeworthy 15 percent. As political consultant Tom Bowen delicately puts it: "This mayor is so weakened by his own hand that eight out of 10 Chicagoans would rather get punched in the face than reelect him."

Ouch. Even with the primary two years away, that kind of sentiment has already fueled early jockeying for who might succeed Johnson. We've ranked 11 speculated-about contenders in order of who we think has the best shot.

1. Alexi Giannoulias Nobody thinks Giannoulias wants to be Illinois secretary of state forever like his predecessor, Jesse White. The perfectly tousled-haired former banker has won two statewide elections (he was Illinois treasurer, too), but can that translate to local success? There's no precedent for a constitutional officer moving into the mayor's seat. Still, Giannoulias has name recognition (his is on every Illinois driver's license), an affable personality (just watch him chuckle his way through reciting "HOKTUAH" and "AXEHOLE" and other

Photo illustration by JOE DARROW

rejected license plates on YouTube), and proven fundraising skills (he has $3.3 million in his war chest). He hasn't been afraid of piling on Johnson either, calling the city's recent credit downgrade "truly maddening." Says one City Hall observer: "If Alexi gets in the race, he would be an early front-runner because of his personal wealth and name ID." He would likely run as a moderate, emphasizing public services over ideology. But some think he's got his eye on a bigger stage, like D.C. (he lost a Senate run to Mark Kirk in 2010) or the governor's mansion.

2. Susana Mendoza The state comptroller has run for mayor before, in 2019, finishing a disappointing-for-her fifth. But that was at the height of the Ed Burke scandal, which tainted anyone in his vicinity. A frequent critic of the mayor on X, she has applauded alderpersons for standing up to him and needled Johnson's administration for showing "zero fiscal discipline." So yes, she thinks she can do better. "Ninety-five percent she's in," says a Northwest Side political operative. "I think she runs in the Paul Vallas lane without the Paul Vallas baggage."

3. Mike Quigley The congressman once said that if he were 10 years younger, he would consider a bid for mayor. Well, he hasn't gotten any younger. So what's changed? With Republicans in control, being a U.S. rep isn't as much fun for a Dem as it once was. But his interest is tenuous at best. "If the field looks deep, he's out," says the Northwest Sider. "If Alexi runs, he doesn't." In his favor: a proven path. His 5th District, which encompasses parts of downtown and the North and Northwest Sides, is the same one Rahm Emanuel represented in his pre-mayor days.

4. Bill Conway The son of a billionaire has become a voice of the moderates in the City Council. Representing the chichi 34th Ward in the West Loop puts him in a position to become the candidate of the business community. "He's made a lot of friends since he's been alderman," says one political consultant. That includes the new Cook County state's attorney, Eileen O'Neill Burke, whom he backed early.

5. Brian Hopkins Before becoming 2nd Ward alderperson in 2015, he was Cook County Commissioner John Daley's chief of staff. "Not to say the Daley family would be behind him, but he has a lot of friends," says the political consultant. "He's thoughtful, he's smart." Still, the last person to to go directly from the City Council to the mayor's office was Monroe Heath – in 1876.

6. Anna Valencia The city clerk is "definitely looking at it," says a lobbyist who had lunch with her a couple of months back. Valencia has won two citywide elections. Still, hers is not exactly a high-profile office. And the fact that she already soundly lost a race to Giannoulias doesn't bode well if they both run. "She's improperly being told she has a shot," says the Northwest Side consultant. "The Latino vote is nonmonolithic, and it's not *that* big – ask Chuy García." Valencia might be smarter to back Mendoza, then run for her seat as comptroller.

> **"Ninety-five percent [Susana Mendoza] is in. I think she runs in the Paul Vallas lane without the Paul Vallas baggage."**
>
> *—a Northwest Side political operative*

7. Janice Jackson Emanuel's people are pushing the former Chicago Public Schools CEO, now serving as CEO of the scholarship program Hope Chicago, to run. Jackson, who left CPS in part because she was tired of fighting the Chicago Teachers Union, has been making the media rounds of late, arguing for more "stability" in education. Being mayor would certainly give her a large hand in that.

8. Luis Gutiérrez After returning to Chicago in 2023 following his short-lived retirement in Puerto Rico, the former congressman is believed to be taking a serious look, but he would have to potentially beat out Mendoza for the Latino vote. He's also contending with a health issue: Macular degeneration has degraded his vision. Word is he's being pushed by charter school advocate Juan Rangel.

9. Kam Buckner The state representative ran for mayor in 2023 – and finished with 2 percent of the vote. Public transportation was his pet issue then, and the struggles of the CTA have made it even more salient. But it's a long ride from the State Capitol to the fifth floor.

10. Brendan Reilly The 42nd Ward alderperson has been noncommittal about running but talks like a candidate, telling the *Sun-Times* that Johnson is a "woefully unprepared" captive of the "radical left" and is well on his way to becoming a "one-termer." Hurting Reilly's chances: He's not well known outside of his downtown district. And he'd have to give up his City Council seat to run, which might make him pause.

11. Lori Lightfoot It seems unfathomable that the former mayor would try to return, considering she didn't even make the runoff last time. But there's been scuttlebutt she's feeling out fundraisers. A year ago, Lightfoot herself told *Chicago* this about holding the office: "I don't want to do anything like that again." But she also added that, after a first year of missteps by Johnson, she had suddenly become "the most popular person in Chicago."

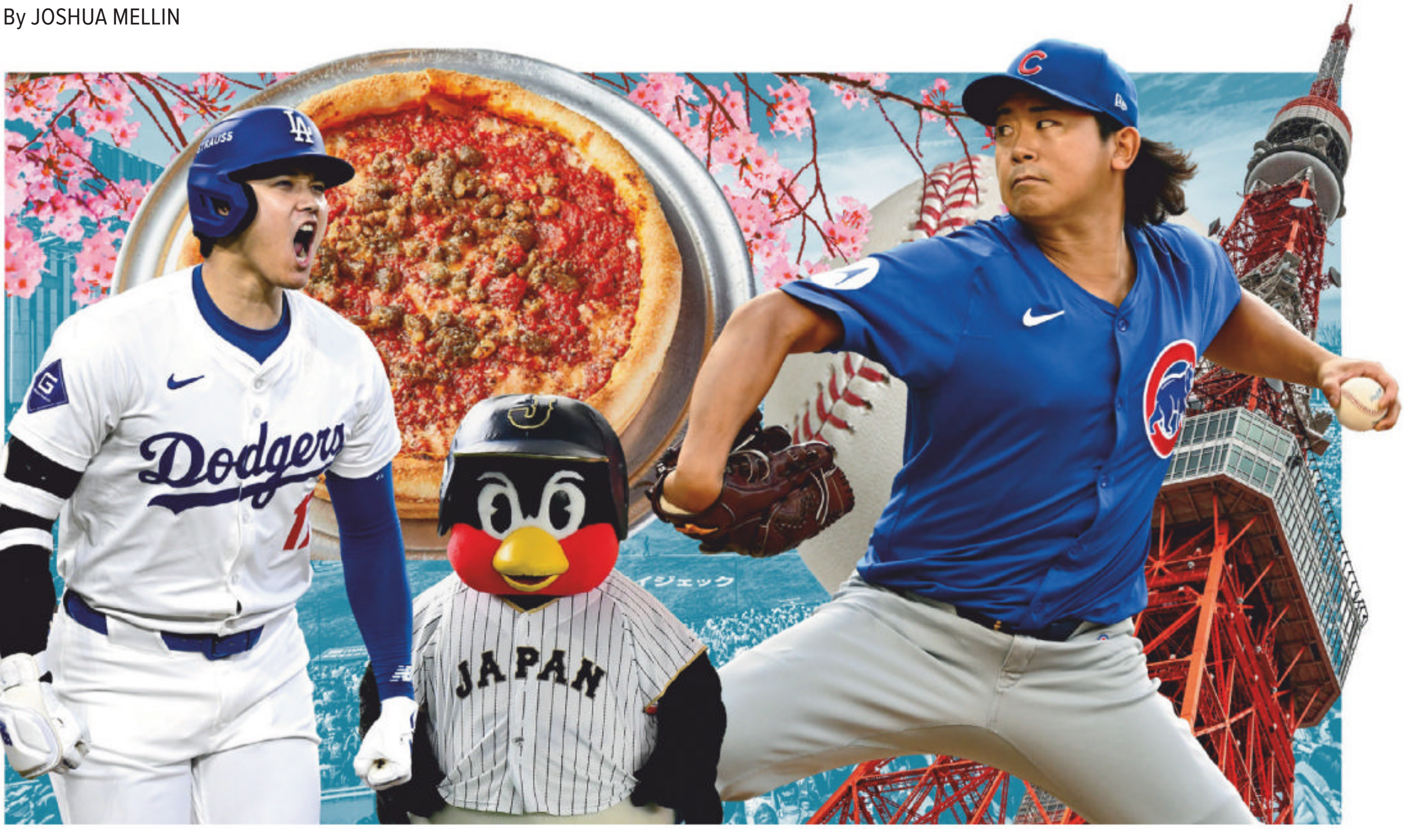
All of this speculation is a fun exercise, but that Johnson won't get reelected is not a foregone conclusion. He might yet rally his progressive base enough to force a runoff, and who knows what might happen if he faces a Paul Vallas–like quasi conservative again. In Chicago politics, stranger things have happened.

PHOTOGRAPHY: *PAGE 19* (BUCKNER, MENDOZA, VALENCIA, CONWAY, QUIGLEY, REILLY, GUTIÉRREZ, HOPKINS) *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*; (LIGHTFOOT) SCOTT OLSON/GETTY; (GIANNOULIAS) TOM WILLIAMS/GETTY; (JACKSON) KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI/GETTY

The Cubs Fan’s Guide to Tokyo

Traveling to the team’s far-flung season opener? This is how to get the most out of your trip.

By JOSHUA MELLIN



PHOTOGRAPHY: (OHTANI) ORLANDO RAMIREZ/GETTY IMAGES; (PIZZA) DEVILCRAFT; (MASCOT) MASTERPRESS/GETTY IMAGES; (IMANAGA) JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES; (TOKYO TOWER, CHERRY BLOSSOMS) GETTY IMAGES

THE CUBS WILL OPEN THEIR season as the home team – but only technically speaking. On March 18 and 19, they will play in a place familiar to stars Shota Imanaga and Seiya Suzuki: Japan. Dubbed the Tokyo Series, the two games will pit the Cubs against the defending World Series champion Dodgers, featuring Japanese compatriots Shohei Ohtani and Yoshinobu Yamamoto, at the 43,500-seat Tokyo Dome. It’s the Cubs’ first appearance in Tokyo since 2000, when they played in MLB’s first-ever regular-season game overseas.

Perhaps it’s not the most convenient destination for the traveling fan. But it sure beats starting the season in St. Louis. Here, some suggestions for your itinerary.

Watch the Cubs take on a couple of local squads

The team will play exhibitions against Tokyo’s Yomiuri Giants and the Hanshin Tigers. Nippon Professional Baseball fans have their own traditions: Outfield seats are reserved for the *oendan*, a cheering section for the hardcore, complete with bands and choreographed songs. (Take note: Wearing the opposing team’s gear is strictly forbidden.) They make Bleacher Bum chants like “Right field sucks” seem minor league.

Visit the Wrigley Field of Tokyo

The city’s oldest ballpark, the 99-year-old Meiji Jingu Stadium, is one of four remaining pro stadiums anywhere that hosted Babe Ruth. It’s currently home to Tokyo’s other NPB team, the Yakult Swallows, and the single-season home run king among Japanese-born players, Munetaka Murakami, who is set to move to MLB after the 2025 season.

Belly up to a bar for baseball obsessives

Forget Sluggers and the Cubby Bear. Kiten!, a cozy sports izakaya covered with NPB memorabilia, is *the* spot for watching baseball. With only about 20 seats (reservations are required), it features three 40-inch TVs and a 100-inch projected screen. For 1,000 yen (about $7), you can name any drink for a year. Anyone fancy a Game 7 Rain Delay?

Shop for a souvenir

Want to show all your friends back in Chicago that you’re a baseball hipster who follows the Japanese league? Stop by Selection Shinjuku, a specialty store that sells NPB and MLB gear. It is one of the few shops to carry jerseys and hats from every team across Japan in one place, including unique alternates and rare throwbacks. Want a Shota Imanaga national team jersey? This is where to find it.

Get a taste of Chicago

No one goes to Tokyo for the pizza — and certainly not for the Japanese take on deep dish, which can be a lost-in-translation gooey fondue. But if you need a taste of home, DevilCraft’s four Tokyo locations serve up craft beer and “shikago” pizza, as it’s known in Japan — including one pie nicknamed the Abe Froman. Is there a sausage king of Tokyo?

Photo illustration by ELIZABETH CARLISLE

VOX

Overdue Bills

Carla Kupe leads Chicago's push toward a reparations program.

Interview by XIMENA N. BELTRAN QUAN KIU

IT'S BEEN 10 YEARS since Ta-Nehisi Coates made Chicago a poster child (and not in a good way) with his essay "The Case for Reparations" in *The Atlantic*. He used our city to highlight how systemic racism and discriminatory policies, particularly involving housing, have perpetuated economic inequality for Black Americans. Since then, public discourse has grown around the topic, and last June, Mayor Brandon Johnson announced a task force to look into a reparations program here. Carla Kupe, the city's chief equity officer, talked with *Chicago* about that effort, which she's leading.

Q: Where do things stand with the reparations initiative?

A: We are looking at March, April, to stand up the task force. We're still in the building phase. We're collaborating with the Black Caucus of the City Council to put the framework together. The general consensus is that the task force will be no bigger than 40 folks. We will have two groups. One will be appointed slots of 25, and then another group of 15 slots that the public can apply for.

Q: Reparations aren't always just about handing out financial payments. They can take other forms, such as a public apology, inside tracks to ownership in industries like cannabis, and home or land grants. How are you defining them here in Chicago?

A: We want Chicago to answer that question. Because we want to be intentional about how we approach reparations, we first have to know how our community defines them, what remedies they think would help the healing process. It's not the government saying, "Well, we think this is what it is," and then pushing it on the community. That's what we want to avoid. We believe that the experts are those impacted. The experts are those closest to the condition of the harm.

Q: How exactly will you go about determining how Chicagoans define reparations?

A: It will be a combination of things. It will involve surveys that have already been done by different community leaders or organizations who have been

Photograph by AKILAH TOWNSEND

“Other cities have backed off or said, ‘Let’s table this one.’ But not Chicago. We will stand firm, and we will continue to commit to this.”

asking the question, “What does reparations look like to you?” The task force will also be having public hearings. Then the task force will issue the report, saying, “This is what we have seen. This is a way forward.”

Q: What if the people you survey ask, “What are you doing for other marginalized communities?”

A: This is where the framing of what reparations are matters. If we are intentional about addressing certain harms that may be more strongly felt by one community, that will benefit the whole. Curb cuts and voice-to-text are for folks with disabilities, but we all benefit from them.

Q: How did this initiative come about? Did Chicagoans ask for it?

A: There have been reparative initiatives even before this year, like through the City Council engaging in establishing economic slavery disclosures, through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events [arts grants], through a task force addressing monuments and seeing which ones should be reframed or removed. This is a commitment to build upon what has already happened. We are engaging as a collective. Coming from my culture, we always look seven generations back and seven generations forward. We want to make sure that this is something that survives you and me. It is about having a long, lasting effect.

Q: With Chicago grappling with issues such as the budget and education, how do you address those people who might question if reparations are where the city should be putting its focus right now?

A: Is this a priority? Yes. As a city, we do stand firm on equity. Other cities have backed off or said, “Let’s table this one.” But not Chicago. We will stand firm, and we will continue to commit to this.

Q: The city has already allotted $500,000 for the task force. But with Chicago facing a continuing budget deficit, where will funding come from to actually implement reparations?

A: Right now it’s really about getting the task force started, having them look at the data. And then that report will get us to the point where we can further talk about funds.

Q: Evanston has allocated $10 million to address housing discrimination, paid through grants to qualifying Black residents, but that program has been challenged by a class-action lawsuit. What have you learned from Evanston’s initiative?

A: What works for Evanston will not work for Chicago. Can we learn from each other? Absolutely. But at the end of the day, it has to be Chicago determining this for itself. It is really understanding that every city has its own historical and contemporaneous uniqueness and particularities. That’s why you see different cities, different states, going about things differently. That’s how it should be.

Q: How does the new Trump administration impact the work you’re doing?

A: Presidents are only here for a certain amount of time. Mayors are here only for a certain amount of time. Our job is to advance equity regardless of whatever happens around us. We’re not turning away from this. We are committed.

REPARATION NATION

Chicago isn’t the first municipality to explore remedies for injustices inflicted on Black communities. Here is how four others are addressing the issue.

EVANSTON
FOUNDED 186

ILLUSTRATION: LINCOLN AGNEW

■ EVANSTON

After committing $10 million to remedy past housing discrimination, the suburb in 2021 became the first U.S. city to pay reparations. Its program provides $25,000 grants for housing needs, such as mortgage payments or renovations, to Black residents who lived in town between 1919 and 1969 or to their descendants. As of November 2024, $5 million has been distributed. Last June, Judicial Watch, a conservative legal group, filed a federal class-action suit against the program, calling it “unconstitutional and discriminatory.”

■ ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

The city earmarked $2.1 million for reparations in 2021—funding stemming from the sale of city-owned land. A commission is still studying the issue, but its suggestions so far include financial settlements, health care subsidies, job training, and education support.

■ PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

In 2022, $10 million was approved for programs to close the wealth gap between whites and minority communities. As of last August, $4.5 million has been disbursed through investments in small businesses and financial literacy programs.

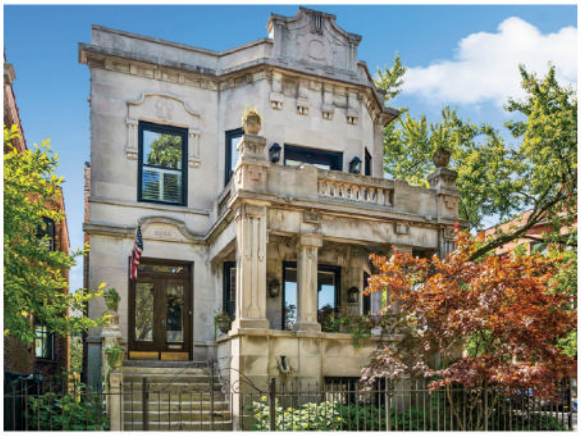
■ ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

In 2023, following a resolution apologizing for “systemic discrimination,” the City Council created a commission tasked with advising how best to address harm caused to descendants of enslaved people. The process got off to a bad start, though, when the City Council had to apologize again—this time for offering the job of commission manager to someone whose ancestors weren’t enslaved.

LISTING OF THE MONTH

Heaven in the City

A home designed by a church architect is up for sale in Logan Square. By THOMAS CONNORS



ARCHITECT HERMANN Gaul cast his lot with the Catholic Church, designing a slew of religious buildings across the Chicago area, from St. Benedict Church in North Center to the Mallinckrodt convent and school in Wilmette, now condos. From time to time, his work took a nonecclesiastical turn, as in the substantial home at 2959 West Logan Boulevard in Logan Square, recently listed for $1.65 million.

Born in Germany in 1869, Gaul immigrated to the U.S. and went to work in the early 1890s in the architecture studio of Louis Sullivan, where he oversaw construction of a plant for Home Brewing Company in Indianapolis. While there, he fell for the daughter of a local saloon owner. Several years later, the two wed, setting up house in Chicago. Twenty years after that, Gaul returned to Indianapolis for the opening of St. Mary Catholic Church, which he had designed with the great Cologne Cathedral as inspiration.

Belgian-born Charles Nestor Godfriaux was a stone contractor who had made good in Chicago by the time Gaul whipped him up the sober limestone Logan Square residence on a wide corner lot, with columns sporting art nouveau motifs. At 4,253 square feet, the house features five bedrooms. The primary suite includes a renovated full bathroom and a large walk-in closet. Down the hall is an office, with a separate sitting room. The first floor is fashioned modernly, with an open-plan living and dining room and a snug family room off the well-equipped kitchen.

For a city home, the house is rich with outdoor spaces. In addition to the front porch and a 15-by-10-foot balcony off the primary bedroom, there's a patio out back and a deck off the kitchen that leads to an expansive roof space atop the detached garage. Who wouldn't say amen to that? ■

MY NEIGHBORHOOD HERMOSA

HORROR AUTHOR CYNTHIA PELAYO RECOMMENDS THESE FOUR SPOTS.

> WORKSHOP 4200

"This historic building used to be the Hammond Organ factory; now it's a great artist space with galleries and a recording studio. I get a cappuccino there at Factotum Coffee, hang out, and write." *4200 W. Diversey Ave.*

> BEYOND GRANDMA'S HOUSE

"I'm divulging my secret place. This massive antique shop has an old gothic vibe. They've got everything: old typewriters, old quilts, old movie equipment that I think is from Chicago's silent film era." *2321 N. Keystone Ave.*

> TACOTLÁN

"Their taco birria is a hearty meal. Birria is a type of stew, and you dip your taco into it. So comforting!" *4312 W. Fullerton Ave.*

> WALT DISNEY'S BIRTHPLACE

"Such a pretty building, very distinctive, on the corner of the block. I write fairy-tale adaptations, and if I'm struggling with a scene, I drive over there and look at the house, because magic was born there, in Hermosa." *2156 N. Tripp Ave.* –INTERVIEW BY WEB BEHRENS

PHOTOGRAPHY: (HOUSE) JARED POWELL/VHT STUDIOS; (PELAYO) MAGDALENA ISKRA

THE REGIMEN

Enrique Mazzola

Lyric Opera conductor, power walker, Nespresso importer

By WEB BEHRENS

TO BE A CONDUCTOR IS to be a sportsman: Your body has to be in good shape,” says Lyric Opera of Chicago music director Enrique Mazzola. “Conducting opera means standing on the podium three hours – four if you do Wagner – with constant movement of the arms.” The Streeterville resident stays trim through diet and exercise, including breaststroke laps in the pool of the former John Hancock Center, where he lives (or in the lake during the summer), and speed walking around the Loop. Born into a musical family in Barcelona, the 56-year-old maestro moved to Milan at 5. Today, he speaks four languages (five if you count his “survival German”) and conducts all over the world. His next production is the new English-language opera *The Listeners*, premiering March 30 – a run bookended by his conducting in Berlin and Tokyo.

WALK THIS WAY
“I love the swimming pool, but what I do most is walk. It’s not just a promenade for window-shopping. I’m very determined. To arrive at the Lyric from the Hancock, I turn at red lights, so I almost never stop. In fact, I never use Michigan Avenue. I don’t want to get stuck with the tourists.”

CAFFEINATED EVOLUTION
“After many years of struggle with myself, I bought a Nespresso machine. The pods travel the Atlantic with me — good Italian pods. My most recent man-in-his-50s habit is that my first café au lait is decaf. Midmorning, I indulge in real cappuccino. I have barley coffee also — in Italy we have this afternoon tradition called caffè d’orzo. And so I found an Italian company producing Nespresso pods of barley coffee.”

PASTA PREDICAMENT
“For me, it became a discipline to eat well: protein, fiber, carbs. It doesn’t mean that I control how many grams I have of this or that; it means I consider what I’m eating. As an Italian, I could eat spaghetti and be happy — but no, I tend never to eat spaghetti in the evening, because the carbs are difficult to burn. I choose fish with vegetables to finish the day.”

ALTERNATIVE MEDITATION
“I like to make risotto. It requires a lot of time. You need a good 30 minutes of philosophical pot-turning with the rice. This I like very much — the meditation. And when I’m conducting in cities around the Alps, I like to go hiking. I do many miles per day. It’s body training — the day after, muscles are sore, but good sore. And it’s also mind training, you know? On the scenic paths, it can be a good way to focus on a music problem, and I can solve it while I’m walking.”

Photograph by LISA PREDKO

PHOTOGRAPHY: (FOOD) GBH007/GETTY IMAGES; (CAPPUCCINO) LIMPIDO/GETTY IMAGES; (COFFEE PODS) DJMILIC/GETTY IMAGES

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Join us at LIVEUNITEDchicago.org

Through the Flames

Jazz virtuoso Isaiah Collier faces our incendiary times head-on with his music.

By MARK BAZER

Photography by ELIZABETH DE LA PIEDRA

ISAIAH COLLIER DOESN'T much want to talk about his past projects. Sitting in the backroom of Robust Coffee Lounge in Woodlawn, the 26-year-old multi-instrumentalist and composer instead seems to relish discussing everything else: how a bandleader is like an architect; why artists must balance humility and pride; how music "forces us to be honest even if we want to be dishonest."

The prolific Collier is, of course, referring to his projects with that last remark. In 2024, he released two acclaimed jazz albums, *The Almighty* and *The World Is on Fire*, that are as honest – and ambitious – as their titles. And in December, the DuSable Black History Museum premiered Collier's *The Story of 400 Years*, a 13-movement suite incorporating dance and visual media that traces the history and impact of Black American music. Both albums featured his longtime band, the Chosen Few, who will join him in concert March 11 at the Harris Theater.

Collier's saxophone playing – particularly on *The World Is on Fire*, released two weeks before the presidential election – is by turns confrontational and plaintive. He packs his compositions full of urgent fury, as in the final and best track, "We Don't Even Know Where We're Headed." You can *feel* a world engulfed in flames before finding a beautiful and graceful, if uncertain, resolution.

"I need to make sure that the artists around me are seeing the state of the world," says Collier. "January 6 happened. Nobody said shit [musically]."

This January afternoon, Collier sports a baseball hat, a black-and-white cravat, and a navy corduroy jacket. (The rings he wears on every finger, in varying degrees of ornateness, are the only sartorial nod to his spiritual jazz leanings.) In conversation, he's quick to laugh – but he's deadly serious on the topic of artists' responsibilities during fraught times. "I need to make sure that the artists around me are seeing the state of the world," he says, "and are also acknowledging that this is not just making a song. January 6 happened. Nobody said shit. The last time I heard a significant piece from an artist in the jazz community, it came from [saxophonist] Jimmy Greene. His daughter was one of the victims of the Sandy Hook massacre. How many other situations have we heard throughout the years that happened and nobody said nothing?"

Gradually, Collier unspools details of his own life. The middle of three sons raised by musician parents, he grew up in Park Manor and Englewood, learning piano around age 5 and sax at 11, thanks in part to early music education at the nearby Salvation Army community center. By 13, Collier was playing R&B at South Side clubs with his parents, who painted a shadow mustache on him to make him look older so that he didn't have to sit in the car between sets.

Collier attended the Chicago High School for the Arts in West Town while also training at the nonprofit Jazz Institute of Chicago. He then went on to study classical saxophone at the now-defunct Brubeck Institute at the University of the Pacific in Northern California. Collier, who currently splits his time between Chicago and New York City, began composing at a furious pace while out west, beginning to shape many of the ideas he's recorded these past few years.

But to hear Collier tell it, this first fertile phase of his career – which includes playing jazz fests in Berlin and Paris and performing at the U.S. embassy in Paraguay – has reached an end. His gig at the Harris might be his last with the Chosen Few: Four days later, on March 15, at Dorian's Through the Record Shop in Wicker Park, he'll play with the Gemini Project, a jazz, R&B, and rock fusion band he formed with his younger brother, Jeremiah.

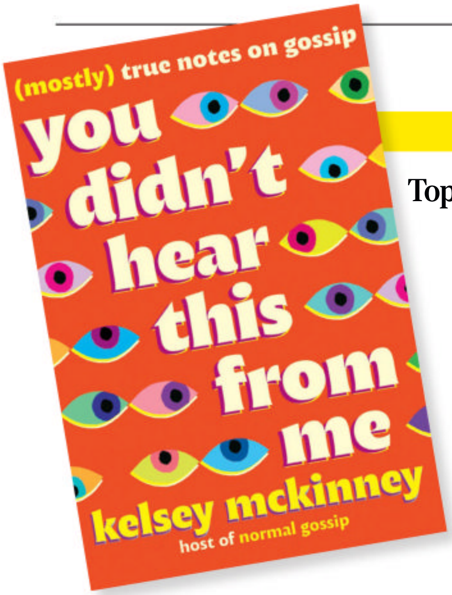
"I'm trying to hear new options," Collier says. "I feel like I've done a lot, but also know I've done so little. I'm at a bit of a brick wall – but the wall for me now is the new direction. Sometimes you hit a wall, you've also got to bring a hammer with you. And so when this happens, it means a breakthrough." C

PHOTOGRAPHY LOCATION COURTESY OF THE CALIFORNIA CLIPPER

AGENDA

Top 10 reasons to fill up your calendar this month

By WEB BEHRENS



GOSSIP GIRL
The Chicago Humanities Festival spills the tea with journalist-podcaster Kelsey McKinney, author of the new book *You Didn't Hear This From Me: (Mostly) True Notes on Gossip. Mar. 1. chicagohumanities.org*

LIGHTS-OUT BIRTHDAY BASH
Local podcast *Filmspotting* celebrates 20 years with a mini movie fest, featuring host faves such as the 1955 Indian classic *Pather Panchali*. Postscreening chat guests include *Columbus* writer-director Kogonada. *Mar. 1. siskelfilmcenter.org*

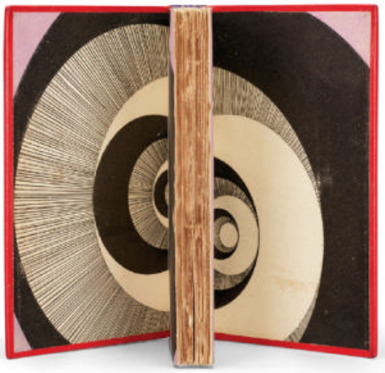
ALOHA GROOVES
Inject some Maui into your winter when Grammy-winning slack-key guitarist George Kahumoku Jr. brings the Masters of Hawaiian Music tour to town. *Mar. 4. oldtownschool.org*

SWAN SONG AND DANCE
After 28 seasons, Englewood native Vernard J. Gilmore returns home on his last tour with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. *Mar. 7–9. auditoriumtheatre.org*

KINKY JUKEBOX
Making its North American premiere, the Olivier Award–winning musical *Sunny Afternoon* gives the *Jersey Boys* treatment to the Kinks. *Mar. 21–Apr. 27. chicagoshakes.com*

ONCE MORE, JACK MISSES THE DOOR
An ongoing off-Broadway hit, the spoof *Titanique* retells the maritime tragedy through Celine Dion's songs. Now it docks here with a local cast. *Mar. 25–May 18. porchlightmusictheatre.org*

PRAISED EYEBROWS
In *Frida Kahlo's Month in Paris: A Friendship With Mary Reynolds*, the Mexican painter's art hangs for the first time in the Art Institute, juxtaposed with the work of the American bookbinder who aided her when she fell ill. *Mar. 29–July 13. artic.edu*



ALL HAIL THE QUEEN
The inheritor of Koko Taylor's "Queen of the Blues" crown, Shemekia Copeland belts songs like nobody's business. *Mar. 30. evanstonspacemusic.com*

FREELANCE FLATTERY
British comedian Milo McCabe found man-on-the-street fame praising shoppers as his dapper alter ego, Troy Hawke. His U.S. tour begins in Pilsen. *Mar. 30. thaliahallchicago.com*

SOUND OFF
In *The Listeners*, a new English-language opera co-commissioned by the Lyric, protagonist Claire suddenly detects a hum nobody else hears. *Mar. 30–Apr. 11. lyricopera.org*

PHOTOGRAPHY: (BOOK) COURTESY OF GRAND CENTRAL PUBLISHING; (KAHUMOKU) JOHN HENRY; (GILMORE) ANDREW ECCLES; (*SUNNY AFTERNOON*) KEVIN CUMMINS; (ART) COURTESY OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO; (HAWKE) STEVE ULLATHORNE

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The trout-roe-adorned deviled eggs at the Loyalist

Devil Worship

Chefs around town are embracing a certain retro party snack and giving it creative flourishes. By AMY CAVANAUGH

Photography by JEFF MARINI

Brian Jupiter (left) filling the deviled eggs at Ina Mae Tavern

THE DEVILED EGG AT THE Loyalist could have been designed by Fabergé. Pickled in beet juice, the jewel-toned half sphere is filled with a blend of egg yolk, smoked trout, mayonnaise, dill, and shallots and adorned with smoked trout roe and dill. It's as delicious as it is beautiful.

"Eggs are one of my favorite things on the planet, and I love them in all kinds of ways," says the Loyalist's John Shields. That sentiment feels true for chefs all over the city, who are using them as a creative canvas. Deviled eggs seem to be on every Chicago menu these days, and what's being served up is a far cry from the wan versions you find sweating on summer picnic tables.

Deviled eggs have a traditional place in the cuisines of France, Eastern Europe, and the American South, which means they fit naturally onto the menus at a variety of restaurants. As a longtime deviled egg fan, I order them whenever I see them. I've had them stuffed with potato salad and pepperoncini aïoli at the Oakville Grill & Cellar; with smoked whitefish caviar, herbs, and black pepper aïoli at Mon Ami Gabi; with crab, hot sauce, and scallions at Dove's Luncheonette; and with tarragon aïoli and celeriac rémoulade at Le Petit Marcel.

Tarragon is also the flavor of choice at Anelya, where Johnny Clark uses tarragon mayo and a Cantabrian anchovy for a salty pop. "When I went to Ukraine in 2023, a friend's mom made them with eggs from chickens in the backyard and dolloped fresh mayo on top," he says. "It's a common predinner snack there, which inspired the one at Anelya."

At the Loyalist, Shields has made a variety of deviled eggs, from one pickled with black truffle juice to one filled with blood sausage mousse and topped with an anchovy ("That was met with some love and some stares," he says). He currently also offers a Spence Farm version, which is sliced in half and topped with Russian dressing. Deviled eggs don't need to be fancy to be beloved. At his New Orleans–inspired Ina Mae Tavern, Brian Jupiter serves his topped simply with hot sauce and scallions, and it's one of the restaurant's bestsellers.

Perhaps no one adores deviled eggs like Funeral Potatoes chef Alexis Rice, who rotates in a new one on the bar menu at Moonflower each month. "They're a great drinking food," she says. "It's like a pickled egg in a jar at the bar. It's salty and savory, and it goes well with a beer or a martini." Among the versions she's offered: a horseradish, olive, and paprika one inspired by her great-grandmother's recipe; a Massaman curry version with toasted coconut and smoky chile oil from Vargo Brother Ferments; and, her bestseller, one filled with Sriracha and ginger.

So why are deviled eggs suddenly everywhere? "They're fast to prep," says Rice. Clark has another explanation: "When there's an economic downturn, people go back to comfort foods. It's something everyone can relate to."

Maybe not everyone. Rice has seen diners who'd been turned off by the basic picnic versions from their youth struggle to embrace today's more cheffed-up offerings. "Some people look at them like they're pickled herring," she says. "It's been fun to open people's minds and rewrite their memories of deviled eggs." ◼

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Potato and ricotta anolini

REVIEW

Hitting Reset

Cellar Door Provisions, a team project once again, is better than ever.

By JOHN KESSLER

THE MORNING ETHAN PIKAS opened Cellar Door Provisions in 2014, two people walked in looking for fresh croissants. Pikas explained they were still rising but he had a few pastries in the case. The couple shook their heads in disappointment and left. Next came a woman who lived nearby in Logan Square and had herself been a pastry chef. She eagerly bought whatever was on hand and became a loyal fan. “You couldn’t write a better scene to show the dichotomy of the way people perceive the restaurant,” says Pikas with a rueful laugh.

CDP has always been a love-it-or-don’t-get-it kind of place – one that turns a certain kind of neighbor into a regular but confounds the occasional visitor who can’t get a handle on its twitchy personality and constant reinvention. Over the past decade it has been a bakery, brunch spot, dinner pop-up, wine bar, and corner bistro. I’ve watched it transition through it all, and despite bumps along the way, it is now one of the city’s best and most distinctive independent restaurants.

That first paying customer, you see, was my old friend Linsey, and when my wife and I moved to Chicago in 2015, CDP was the first restaurant she took us to. In its earliest years, when Pikas was still with his opening partner, Tony Bezsylko, we obsessed over the baking – the matcha canelés, the custardy quiche, and particularly the sourdough bread and house-cultured butter. There were also dishes made with local, organic produce – roasted roots and pickle-y salads – that made for odd bedfellows but also made sense. You got to know Pikas and Bezsylko through their collaborative cooking and commitment to keeping it weird.

When they began offering four-course dinners on the weekends, we hopped on that train to try beef heart mousse (not my thing) and fermented rutabaga with buttermilk (way better than it sounds). When Linsey and her partner, Scott, decided to marry, we joined them here for a simple ceremony conducted between courses.

The pandemic was hard on the restaurant. “Our to-go dinner service failed miserably,” says Pikas, who had to dismiss all but one of his 23 employees. He and Bezsylko decided to transform the counter-service spot into a wine bar. The remodel, which added a full-length counter, tested their partnership, which ultimately ended because of their differing visions of what the final product should be. Pikas bought Bezsylko out and reopened CDP as a solo project in late 2021.

I stopped by for a meal at the bar soon thereafter, and it was disheartening. The sunny room from before had become a brooding creature of the night with its dim lights. I ordered lamb belly off the short, odd menu and found it as impenetrable as Deadpool’s body armor. A cloudy natural wine was the only red by the glass, and the room was thick with smoke thanks to the kitchen’s underperforming hood (still a problem on hot days). I heard many similar reports and figured I’d wait to return until a thumbs-up or two came my way.

Then, in July of last year, Pikas hired Alex Cochran as chef de cuisine. Cochran brought fine-dining chops (John’s Food & Wine, Kumiko) and an interest in Japanese techniques such as kelp curing. From the get-go Cochran’s skill set has complemented what Pikas calls his own “West Coast hippie mentality” and superlative baking game. Their synergy has brought CDP into its best version yet.

Photography by JEFF MARINI

Alex Cochran and Ethan Pikas

Parsnip ice cream

Two of you can easily order half the daily evolving menu. You may start with Murder Point oysters (Alabama's finest) kissed by flame and glossed with a buttery sauce of cured pork fat, sake, and fig leaf vinegar – a combo that makes glorious sense on the tongue. (It's one of those "Do we need another order?" dishes.) Fat wedges of golden beets are roasted in (and served with) their skins in a horseradish cream. A creamy dip of fermented squash and garlic confit comes with an enormous carta di musica cracker for snacking joy, particularly when paired with a plate of gently pickled carrots, radishes, and piparra peppers.

Sometimes the dishes are straightforward: Potato and ricotta anolini (small ravioli) in caper brown butter could be the pride of any pasta place. Citrus-cured ocean trout with elderflower broth and a dot of kosho paste subtly nods to tiradito with its silky texture and jolt of spice. But more often they're unusual: Fermented, roasted black radishes under foamed Parmesan were interesting enough for me to finish, though I never decided if I actually liked them. Parsnip ice cream with a well-salted einkorn crumble and fruity olive oil convinced me of its brilliance after the first bite.

To go with all that, front-of-house manager Sara McCall has a thoughtful beverage list that's light on cocktails but rich in modern-style wines such as Meigamma vermouth from Sardinia and a lovely Gamay-forward Loire red blend (Clos du Tue-Boeuf) that I always want for a first glass. Almost no bottle hits triple digits in price.

While I do miss the morning pastries, the bread and butter can be the best in the city. I say "can be" because it was different on two visits. That tracks. Pikas and Cochran are always in tweak mode, so inconsistencies are built into CDP's DNA. And thus there are some flops: Why do kombu butter sauce and raw sorrel do so little for a grilled mackerel fillet? And I think a Klingon would be put off by the texture of grilled beef coulotte over slimy wood ear mushrooms.

Sometimes you can taste the beta trial. A Garnet yam cake, peppery and moist, was so good, though we ate around its meringue cap. When I asked Pikas about the lovely spicing, he told me they removed the topping the next day. Maybe that's why I feel such affection for this oddball restaurant. Lots of chefs offer signature dishes that never change, so they become craftsmen and their food loses its animating spirit. These two guys are always playing around, and you taste their joy. ◼

CELLAR DOOR PROVISIONS
★★½
3025 W. Diversey Ave., Logan Square
■ **Dinner for two** $150
■ **Tip** If you're looking for dinner on a weekday night, there's usually a lively semi-crowd and no wait.

★ Recommended
★★ Very good ★★★ Excellent
★★★★ Exceptional

NEIGHBORHOOD FIND

Sweet and Hot

NOVEL PIZZA CAFE
1759 W. 19th St.,
Heart of Chicago
■ **Perfect order** Longanisa and giardiniera pizza ($31.50) and ube latte ($6.50)

■ Something special happens when pork, sugar, and hot peppers find each other, which is why hot honey and spicy pepperoni cups have become a popular one-two punch for pizza. While you can order that combination at Novel Pizza Cafe, a rising star on the tavern-style scene, the folks here — cousins Francis Almeda and Ryan Catolico, plus their friend Enrique Huizar — have figured out a new formula. By mixing longanisa (the sweet sausage of Filipino plate breakfasts) with hot giardiniera, they hit all the right notes in such a, well, novel way that you want to keep reaching for square after crispy square to let your tongue untangle the flavor anew. The crust is a tad thicker than other tavern pies, giving it a nice chew. The tomato sauce is jammy and crimson, and the relative lack of grease appealing.

Unsurprisingly, given that Almeda is also behind Side Practice Coffee and Drip Collective, this matchbox restaurant on the edge of Harrison Park, just down from the National Museum of Mexican Art, functions as a coffee shop during the day. So head in midafternoon to avoid the crowds. Sip on a sweet ube latte and order a pizza to go. But do yourself a favor: Sneak a piece or three before you leave.
– JOHN KESSLER

Longanisa and giardiniera pizza

Jeremiah Zimmer and Jude La Rose in Hop Butcher's taproom

Beer Scientists

By tapping new hops and out-there ingredients, Hop Butcher for the World has become one of Chicago's buzziest breweries. By KARL KLOCKARS

IT TAKES A LOT TO STAND OUT AMONG CHICAGO'S BEER MAKERS. BUT if there is one brewery that best represents drinkers' tastes in the 2020s, Hop Butcher for the World might be it, thanks to its embrace of new hops and its eagerness to explore weird (but great!) flavors.

Jude La Rose and Jeremiah Zimmer launched South Loop Brewing Co. a decade ago, rebranding it in 2016 as Hop Butcher for the World (a play on poet Carl Sandburg's famous description of Chicago), which fit their emphasis on the then-new phenomenon of juicy, hazy IPAs. They make an annual trip to Washington's Yakima Valley, one of the world's largest hop-growing regions, to seek out the latest offerings. "Companies provide early access to anyone who's willing to experiment," La Rose says. That aptly describes Hop Butcher. At its North Center taproom (4257 N. Lincoln Ave.), you can try barrel-aged stouts made with the likes of Frango mint oil and pineapple soft serve.

The two acquired the taproom and accompanying brewery from Half Acre in 2022. That and a second production facility allowed them to expand distribution to 35 states and extend offerings into less bitter areas, like with the lager Butcher Gold. Still, beers with names like Neon Green Relish, Giardiniera, and Urbs in Horto continue to nod to edgier flavors, and the taproom serves as a de facto focus group for further experimenting. Says Zimmer: "We can put something in a keg and see what people think."

Ask the Dining Editor

I want corned beef for St. Patrick's Day. Where do you recommend?
For me that holiday has always been a perfect excuse to try a new corned beef sandwich. Some favorites include the Fat Shallot's classic Reuben on marbled rye and Steingold's hot corned beef sandwich on grilled Publican Quality rye with brown mustard (it's called the Grandpa Joe). For something outside the box, head to Schneider Deli for the deli hot dog topped with sauerkraut, mustard, and corned beef—it's tasty, but you can get a sandwich there, too, if you prefer.

Where would you go for a casual lunch meeting?
I was at TenGoku Aburiya at noon on a recent Friday and found the room full of pairs and groups meeting up. The menu of Japanese classics is affordable, and the tempura udon was just right for a chilly day. Another suggestion: Dove's Luncheonette. I could imagine a meeting there going well over a plate of that fantastic brisket hash and some masa pancakes.
–AMY CAVANAUGH

Email Amy at acavanaugh@chicagomag.com with your burning dining questions.

ILLUSTRATION: GREG CLARKE

Photograph by JEFF MARINI

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The Hot List

10 places everyone's talking about (in order of heat)

Il Carciofo

Gus' Sip & Dip

1 **IL CARCIOFO** **What** Joe Flamm's latest explores his love of Rome. **Why** Any Flamm spot means it's gonna be a hot reservation; expect pastas and small plates inspired by the Eternal City. **Where** *1045 W. Fulton Market, West Loop*

2 **GUS' SIP & DIP** **What** Three Dots and a Dash's Kevin Beary and Scott Kitsmiller give drinkers what they want: $12 classic cocktails. **Why** First sip (dirty martinis), then dip (shrimp cocktail). **Where** *51 W. Hubbard St., River North*

3 **SOTTO** **What** A fresh Italian American restaurant and a bar underneath the storied Italian Village. **Why** Because everything old is new again: to wit, Parmesan espresso martinis. **Where** *71 W. Monroe St., Loop*

4 **CHAPEL STREET CAFE** **What** The Hilton Mag Mile gets an Aussie café. **Why** Flat whites take you down under. **Where** *198 E. Delaware Pl., Streeterville*

5 **CLUB X SPEAKEASY** **What** A hidden bar inside Exchequer Restaurant & Pub **Why** Sip affordable wine in a retro space. **Where** *224 S. Wabash Ave., Loop*

6 **AU LEVAIN BAKERY & CAFE** **What** The pop-up lands a sunny brick-and-mortar space. **Why** Angel Chavez spreads his wings with lox sammies on sourdough English muffins. **Where** *4301 N. Lincoln Ave., North Center*

7 **TAQUIZAS VALDEZ** **What** A vibrant taqueria from Ivan Valdez (formerly of West Town Bakery) **Why** Down plates of pollo al limón tacos and al pastor tortas with charred pineapple. **Where** *3038 W. Irving Park Rd., Albany Park*

8 **BROKEN HEARTS** **What** Heisler Hospitality's latest: a tavern and music venue with karaoke and pool **Why** We'll catch you for frozen Jack and Cokes while taking in a country band. **Where** *1009 W. Lake St., West Loop*

9 **YASEMI** **What** Soirée Hospitality (Bar Goa) goes Mediterranean at the Godfrey Hotel. **Why** Dunk pita into whipped harissa feta and you'll feel light years from March slush. **Where** *127 W. Huron St., River North*

10 **THE GOOD WOLF** **What** The team behind the beloved joint Little Bad Wolf adds an upscale neighbor spot. **Why** Make a meal of Chicago classic shrimp de Jonghe and beef Wellington. **Where** *1547 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Andersonville*

PHOTOGRAPHY: (IL CARCIOFO) MATT HASS; (GUS' SIP & DIP) LINDSAY EBERLY X EBERLY FILM LAB

IN THE KITCHEN

Layering Season

MAKING THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF LAO Peng You's scallion noodles is just the project to while away a late-winter afternoon. Neutral oil is slowly, gently infused with four types of onions, and the byproducts in turn underscore a soy sauce that tastes deeply of caramelized alliums. You'll wind up with generous portions of both oil and soy, but, per chef Chops Wat, they'll keep in the fridge for several weeks, ready to lend huge flavor to a final dish that requires little more effort than boiling some noodles. The finished product is deceptively simple yet wonderfully complex. –CATE HUGUELET

LAO PENG YOU'S SCALLION NOODLES

Makes 1 serving
Time 2 hours for advance prep; 15 minutes for final dish

3	**cups canola oil**
5	**cups thinly sliced scallions, white part only**
¼	**cup thinly sliced ginger**
5	**cups thinly sliced white onions**
4	**cups thinly sliced shallots**
¼	**cup cilantro**
2½	**cups spring onions, green part only, cut into long, flat pieces**
1¾	**cups light soy sauce**
¼	**cup dark soy sauce (available at H Mart)**
½	**cup lump sugar (available at H Mart)**
¼	**cup raw cane sugar**
6	**oz. fresh thin Chinese wheat noodles (available at H Mart)**

1

Make the scallion oil: In a wok, heat oil to 284 degrees. Add scallions and ginger and fry until golden, about 25 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer to a paper-towel-lined baking tray. Allow oil to return to 284, then add white onions and shallots and repeat the frying process. Remove and reserve shallots and onions, then add cilantro to oil, fry briefly, and remove. Heat oil to 293, then turn off the burner and add spring onions. Fry until dark and crispy, about 15 minutes, then remove from oil and reserve. Cool oil, then strain into a resealable container and reserve in the refrigerator.

2

Make the scallion soy sauce: In the wok, heat ½ cup scallion oil over medium. Add 2 cups reserved fried scallions and 3 cups reserved fried shallots and onions and cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add soy sauces and ¾ cup water and bring to a boil. Add sugars, boil until dissolved, then reduce heat and simmer to meld flavors, 5 to 10 minutes. Cool and reserve in a resealable container in the refrigerator.

3

Make the dish: Cook noodles according to package instructions. Drain and place in a bowl. Top with ¼ cup scallion soy sauce (making sure to include some onion bits) and 1 tablespoon scallion oil. Top with a mixture of reserved fried shallots and onions and serve.

Photograph by JEFF MARINI

"I didn't know what I needed, but together we figured it out."

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Personal Sanctum

Interior designer Alissa Johnson created a serene space she calls home inside a retrofitted 1905 West Town church.

By HEIDI MITCHELL

PHOTOGRA

Photography by FIRST LASTNAME

Johnson kept the wood cabinetry and marble island that had been in the unit when she was renting. *Opposite page, left:* The reading nook is one of Johnson's favorite spots to recharge. "It's got a cool funky chair and some shearling to add texture. I love creating little moments." *Opposite page, right:* The primary bedroom features a linen headboard with Parachute linen sheets.

PHOTOGRAPHY: RYAN MCDONALD | STYLIST: KIMBERLY SWEDELIUS

YOU'D BE FORGIVEN FOR walking past the former St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church on North Hoyne Avenue in the Ukrainian Village without giving it a second glance. There are a lot of old religious buildings in this pocket of West Town. And Alissa Johnson, principal of her namesake interior design firm, would whiz by the red brick pile on her regular jogs, paying it little mind. "Then one day I noticed signs stating someone was turning it into rentals," she recalls. The Texas transplant fell for a second-floor unit, moved in, and, when the landmarked Gothic Revival–style building was converted to condos three years later, snapped up her rental. "It's so unique. No one suspects there are nine homes inside," she says.

Following the process she uses with clients, Johnson created a mood board to help visualize the transformation of the white box into a cozy starter home that mirrored her materials-focused design style. With modern wood flooring, sleek cabinetry, and an open floor plan, there was no need to move walls. Instead, she focused on filling the three-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath condo with furnishings and art that felt both elevated and functional. "Juxtaposing old and new, and varying textures, is central to my design philosophy," she explains.

Though Johnson encourages bold choices for her clients, her own home embraces a serene, neutral palette, allowing for subtle tweaks that make a significant impact. "I wanted a calm, airy atmosphere since I'm constantly surrounded by colors and choices in my work," she says. "But I love swapping out art, vases, and lighting."

In the living room, a durable white sofa by Maiden Home accommodates her two dogs and rests atop a Loloi black-and-white deep-pile wool rug that adds texture. Above a CB2 brass cabinet hangs a Samsung Frame TV, which doubles as a changeable art piece. In the dining area, a circular table with Noir cane chairs sits beneath an oversize light fixture by France & Son, adding dramatic flair visible from the street. "I love doing something linear above a dining table," Johnson notes. Personal touches like a travel and family photo collage add warmth. Johnson regularly mixes things up: "I swap out art, lamps, and pillows twice a year."

A reading nook by a window, however, remains constant. With a floor lamp, artwork, and vintage vases, it's become a favorite spot. "I created a little vignette in what was a dead area," she says. A Rove Concepts chair and ottoman draped in shearling invite her to relax with her dogs or chat on the phone with friends back in Texas, where she grew up.

In the primary bedroom, a king-size bed dressed in Parachute linen sheets takes center stage, flanked by burled wood nightstands from Worlds Away and sconces that free up table space. "Linen is breathable and fits the organic feel I wanted," she says. A traditional rug with blue accents ties the room together, complemented by Jonathan Pliego art on the walls. "Accessories make a huge difference."

"I wanted a calm, airy atmosphere since I'm constantly surrounded by colors and choices in my work."

The office, painted in Farrow & Ball's Dead Salmon, showcases Johnson's design sensibilities. The color shifts with the sunlight from white to pink to peach throughout the day, adding depth. A Noir wooden desk with ribbed legs and sides anchors the space. A Kelly Wearstler lamp and plants reflect Johnson's tidy aesthetic. Across from the desk, a horseshoe-shaped console by CB2 displays a rotating collection of design inspo.

In the guest room, a white bouclé sleeper sofa and red marble dresser by CB2 highlight Johnson's love for layered textures and materials. "I always include marble somewhere: kitchen, living room, bedroom. The natural element makes a room feel cozy," she says.

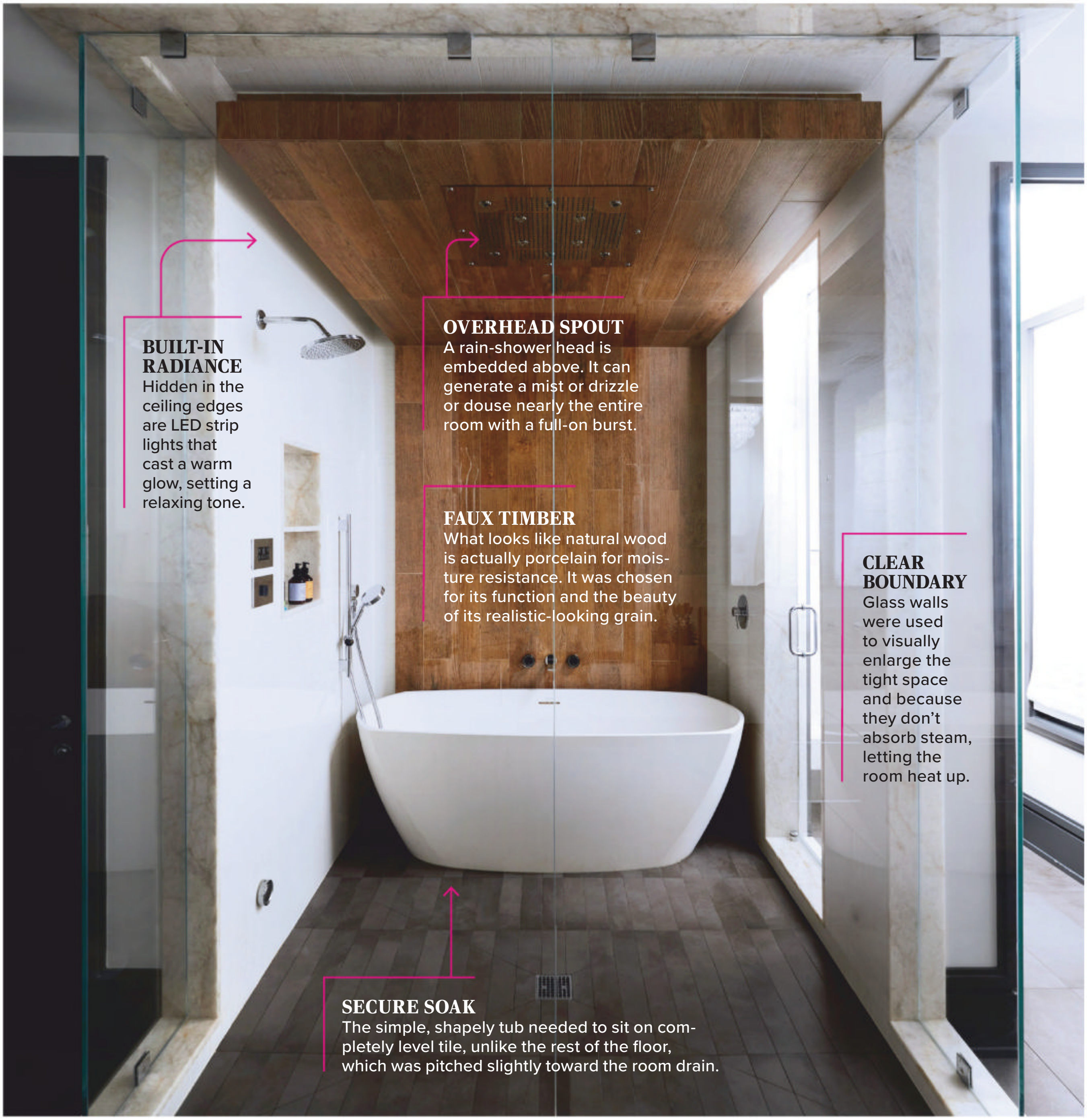
Johnson's transformation of this 1905 church interior into a tranquil refuge underscores a belief that design should enhance the way we live. "This is my haven," she says. "A place to relax, recharge, and entertain." Hidden in plain sight, her sacred home creates beauty in unexpected places. ◼

THE ANNOTATION

Splash Pad

A wet room in Wilmette was designed for the ultimate bathing experience. By KELLY AIGLON

A RELAXING BATH OR SHOWER IS ONE THING. COMBINING the two is a whole other level of indulgence. That's what interior designer Renata Buenrostro of Evanston's Morgante Wilson Architects did when she converted a North Shore client's traditional bathroom into a spacious wet room, where you are free to float from tub to steam to rain shower with the ease of water flowing down a central drain. "It makes the room feel bigger and more modern," Buenrostro says. Here are some takeaways.



BUILT-IN RADIANCE
Hidden in the ceiling edges are LED strip lights that cast a warm glow, setting a relaxing tone.

OVERHEAD SPOUT
A rain-shower head is embedded above. It can generate a mist or drizzle or douse nearly the entire room with a full-on burst.

FAUX TIMBER
What looks like natural wood is actually porcelain for moisture resistance. It was chosen for its function and the beauty of its realistic-looking grain.

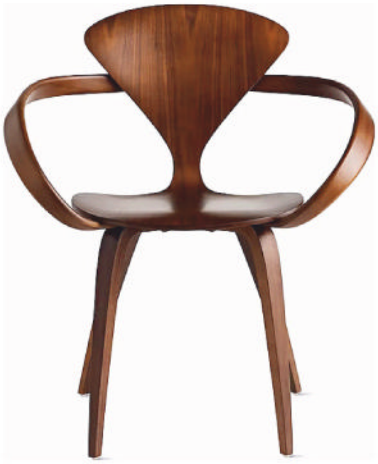
CLEAR BOUNDARY
Glass walls were used to visually enlarge the tight space and because they don't absorb steam, letting the room heat up.

SECURE SOAK
The simple, shapely tub needed to sit on completely level tile, unlike the rest of the floor, which was pitched slightly toward the room drain.

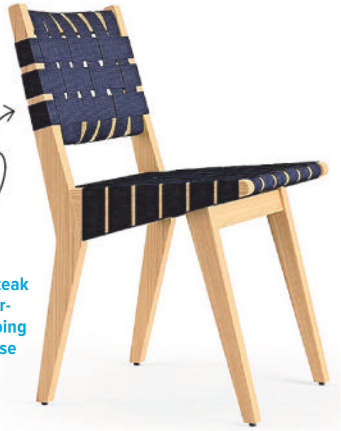
PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE SCHWARTZ

Hot Seats

These modern accent chairs sizzle as artful yet essential elements. By DAVID SYREK

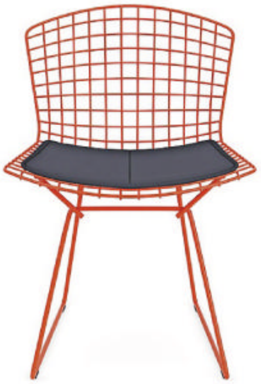


Curves in the dining room: Cherner beech armchair with walnut veneer, $1,679. *Design Within Reach, 755 W. North Ave.*

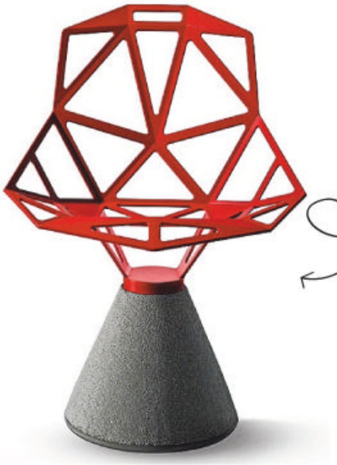


Also comes in teak with weather-resistant webbing for outdoor use

Sleekness in the sunroom: Side chair by Jens Risom for Knoll in maple with cotton straps, $805. *Design Within Reach.*

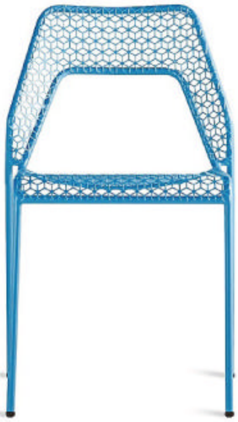


Breeziness in the bedroom: Side chair by Harry Bertoia with steel frame and foam pad, $1,122. *Knoll, 1100 W. Fulton Market*

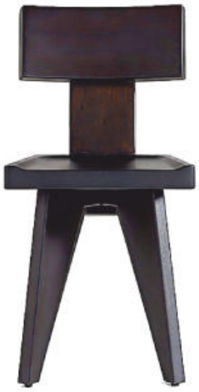


You can opt for a version that swivels

Sculpture in the den: Chair One by Konstantin Grcic for Magis with die-cast aluminum seat and concrete base, $1,285. *hivemodern.com*



Color pop on the patio: Hot Mesh stackable steel chair, $185. *Blu Dot, 1953 N. Clybourn Ave.*



The back is curved and seat carved for comfort

Sturdiness in the foyer: Yukon acacia side chair, $499. *Crate & Barrel, 850 W. North Ave.*

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF THE VENDORS

NEXT

Abby Pucker

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BIG

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THINGS

FROM A TEENAGE RAPPER WHO'S BLOWING UP TO PRO WRESTLING'S GREAT NEW VILLAIN, THESE 10 CHICAGOANS ARE POISED TO LEAVE THEIR MARK.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY Lyndon French AND Evan Jenkins

All Posts
U can block me but u can't block the memory of u sucking my toes

Abby Pucker has emerged as an influential funder of the arts in Chicago.

THE ARTS BOOSTER

Abby Pucker

Abby Pucker is speaking to me by Zoom from the driver's seat of her car, wearing a plain gray sweatshirt, with her hair pulled back in a ponytail. "I found this great parking spot on my way to the Loop, and I'm not giving it up," she says. I wouldn't have expected Pucker, a member of the Pritzker family (she's JB's cousin), to be quite so relatable in her appreciation of something as simple as a good parking spot. But I quickly realize it is this trait that has helped make her a burgeoning, formidable civic fundraiser.

For the past few years, Pucker's mission has been to energize the arts scene here. Her main vehicle for that is Gertie, the cultural consultancy she founded in 2022. (Gertie as in Gertrude Stein, because Pucker was inspired by the thriving café culture of Paris.) The private agency has already run million-dollar fundraisers, including one for *Next Stop: Chicago*, seven public art projects installed along the CTA's Green Line during the Democratic National Convention (or, in the case of the Loop's *Wabash Lights*, permanently). Perhaps most impressively, Pucker, 33, has organized what is quickly becoming a tentpole event for visual arts in the city: Chicago Exhibition Weekend, a four-day experience that spotlighted nearly 50 galleries across the city in its second annual edition last fall and also featured artist talks, a nighttime bazaar, and a studio crawl.

Last year, Pucker launched EarlyWork, a Gertie membership program ($55 a month) that gives art appreciators and up-and-coming collectors special access to exclusive events, including meals with artists and visits with established collectors at their homes. "How do we create an ecosystem here in Chicago that is more fertile for the arts?" Pucker says. "The way I've found to do that is to create these moments of excitement and energy that amplify and show all of these amazing artists." –KIM BROOKS | 📷 E.J.

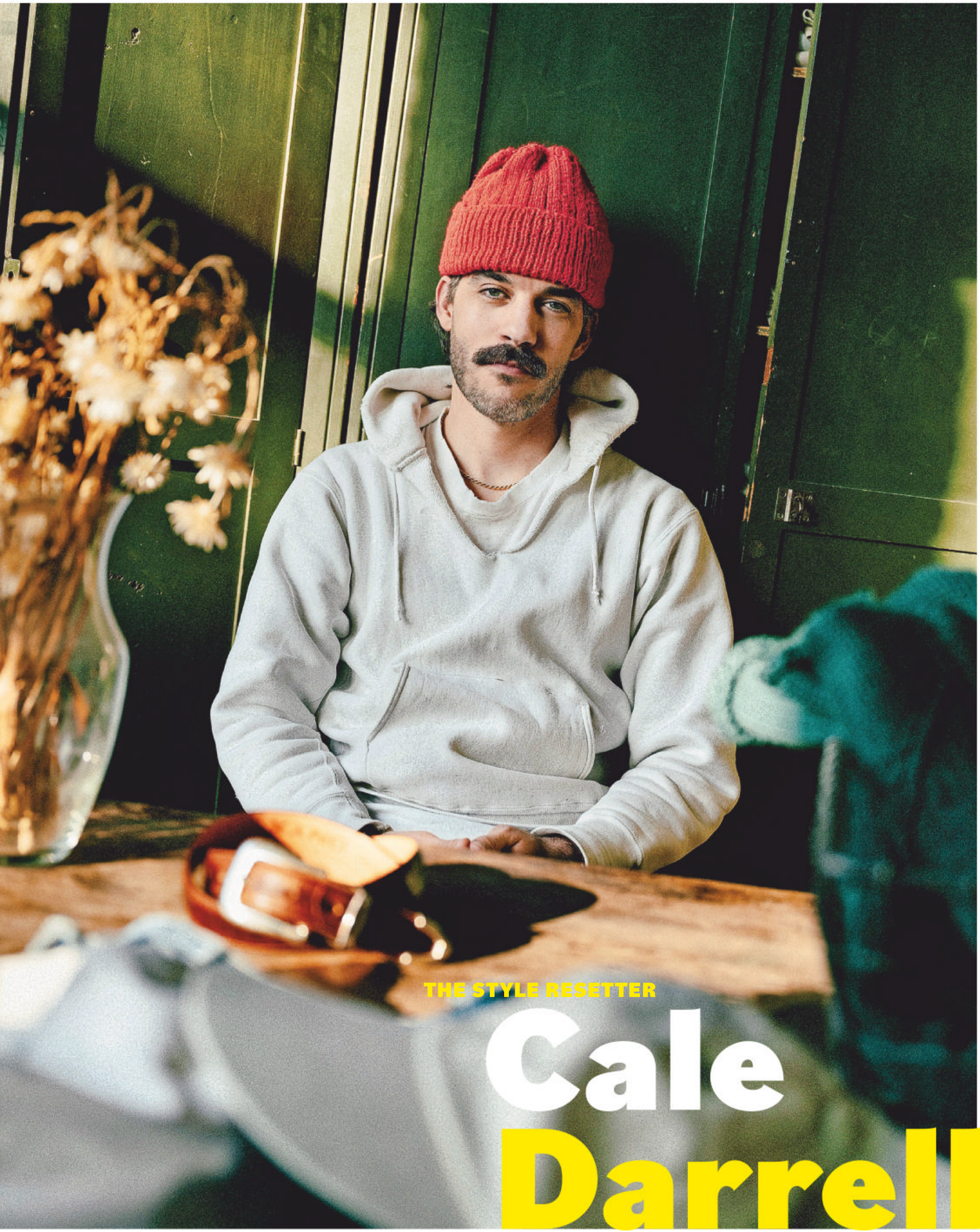
→

Cale Darrell was sitting on his couch, scrolling through Instagram, when he came across a picture that stopped his thumb cold. It was an ad for Bose headphones featuring Donald Glover in a khaki bodysuit with a distinct black stain on the crotch. Darrell had seen the garment before: He'd carried it at Good Form Vintage, his West Town vintage clothing store. "He's wearing a pair of insanely rare coveralls from the 1930s," the Monroe, Ohio, native recalls in an earthy twang. "I found them at a flea market at like 3 in the morning."

Glover is a frequent customer. So are the Jonas Brothers, as well as an array of men's fashion influencers and designers. Since Darrell, 38, established Good Form at the beginning of 2020, it's become one of the buzziest sources for vintage menswear in America. In the past year, Darrell has been featured in both *Esquire* and *GQ*. And his finds have outfitted the protagonist of *Mr. Throwback*, a Peacock show about a sports memorabilia salesman.

The store is open by appointment only, but the website is where Darrell built his rep. The clothes, sleekly arranged by color against a white backdrop, are sold in closely followed limited drops. With a mix of self-deprecation and genuine reverence, Darrell describes the spectrum of offerings as "basic Ralph Lauren" and "'90s celebrity airport style." There's plenty of North Shore prep at reasonable prices (often less than $100) but also rare midcentury military clothing and even older workwear, like Glover's bodysuit, that get into the mid–triple digits. The criteria: "Clean, the color is true, and nothing synthetic."

Darrell recounts a friend telling him that Good Form was "the first contemporary vintage brand," and it got him thinking about his own fashion line. This summer, he intends to debut Former Studies, a capsule collection of eight pieces informed by his vintage finds. At his shop, his 6-foot-1 frame pads around in one of them: a pair of dark indigo jeans that he estimates will retail for about $250. They have a drawstring and a triangular drape. And frankly, they look sick. –TAL ROSENBERG | 📷 L.F.



THE STYLE RESETTER

Cale Darrell

THE COMEDY DYNAMO

Adisa Williams

A few hours before she is due to dazzle yet another crowd in Second City's marquee Mainstage show, Adisa Williams is discussing her rapid rise. "I really didn't intend to do it as a career," she says of comedy. Despite pursuing it full-time only since 2022, she has thrice auditioned for *Saturday Night Live* in New York, once making it to the final round. (Merely being invited to audition is a compliment.) "You're very talented—you should come see the show," Williams recalls *SNL* creator Lorne Michaels telling her. To this day, she jokes, "I don't know if that was a consolation or a 'Keep at it.' "

Williams, who grew up in Boston and Jamaica, first started dabbling in comedy in 2016 while living in Seattle and toiling as an Amazon Prime Video product manager. She taught herself standup from books and tested out jokes she kept in a Google doc during open mic nights. Buoyed by improv teachers who saw her promise, she knew the next move was a geographic one. "When I was 14 or 15, I loved to look up people I admired and read their entire Wikipedia page. I remember going deep on Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, and Jessica Williams. I was like, OK, it looks like Jessica was in ComedySportz. Tina went through Second City. Everybody went through this little hidden underground." Inspired, Williams set off to Chicago in 2019 to work for JPMorgan Chase and burnish her comedy creds.

She started with Second City under a fellowship in 2020 and is now getting raves for her performances in the company's current revue, *The Devil Is in the Detours*. A former drama kid, choirgirl, and amateur dancer (everything from hip-hop to ballroom), Williams, 32, has a pleasant singing voice and physical fluidity that augment her high-energy hilarity. An invite to join *SNL* remains atop her wish list, but she knows nothing—especially in show biz—is guaranteed: "I'll be applying again this year, and that's all I can do." –MIKE THOMAS | 📷 E.J.

THE RISING RAPPER

Star Bandz

Star Ana Flowers, the 16-year-old rapper better known as Star Bandz, is relaxing in her bedroom at her family's house in south suburban Sauk Village. This isn't your typical teenager's crib: Designer bags hang from the walls. Pristine shoeboxes line her closets like trophies, each carefully preserved to showcase the labels. A plaque from YouTube commemorates her reaching 100,000 subscribers.

It's a fitting space to show off the bounty from her recent breakout success, since this room has also served as her muse. "Every time a song blows up that I wrote in my room, I just think, Dang, I was really in this bed," she says. "I made so many good songs in here, just sitting here with my legs crisscrossed applesauce."

Her biggest hit, "Yea Yea," released last March, was named one of the 100 best songs of the year by *Pitchfork*. The accompanying video, which has more than 4 million views on YouTube, was filmed, in part, during her 16th birthday party. "I'm 16 doing shows / Rock out like I'm a guitar," she raps on the track. (She keeps her lyrics mostly age-appropriate—no cussing.)

Flowers grew up singing but didn't begin rapping until five years ago, after a friend of her mother's encouraged her. "I was talking about money, I was talking about my family, like my mom, my brother," she recalls of her first song. "It was good for a 12-year-old." In 2023, she started to find success with a trio of singles whose videos each reached a million views on YouTube.

Now she's back at work, listening to new beats and writing new bars. This year expect a deluxe version of *Estrella*, the mixtape she dropped in 2024—including the viral smash "My Baby," a collaboration with New York City rapper Sugarhill Ddot—and a debut album. Bandz, who has already opened for bigtime rappers like Lil Durk and Polo G, also has plans for a national tour. All of this leaves little doubt: Star is already living up to her name. –BRITT JULIOUS | 📷 EVAN SHEEHAN

THE AVANT-GARDE ARTIST

Isabelle Frances McGuire

When Isabelle Frances McGuire embarks on a new artwork, there are two requirements: It must be ambitious, and it has to be irreverent. Take *Symbolic Birth Cabin Unit*, an enormous reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln's first home, which was the centerpiece of *Year Zero*, the artist's recent solo show at the University of Chicago's Renaissance Society. "It's an 'American story,' which became interesting because I was like, What does that even mean?" says McGuire, 30. "What are the clichés of American stories that get retold over and over again?"

McGuire's work merges popular technology with the hackneyed subjects of popular iconography. At a 2023 solo exhibit at the Manhattan gallery King's Leap, the artist had a robotic Baby Yoda peering around a room and a talking bust of Elvis Presley wearing night vision goggles. Where's the high tech in Lincoln's cabin? Computer-aided milling cut its foam logs, which McGuire then painted by hand.

Year Zero was the capstone of an auspicious 18 months for McGuire, who grew up in Mount Prospect and holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The 30-year-old is part of *Descending the Staircase*, a group exhibition through July 6 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the King's Leap show landed on famed curator Bob Nickas's list of the best of 2023. *Cultured* magazine dubbed McGuire "your favorite curator's favorite artist."

These accolades are the fruits of a venture McGuire pursued during the pandemic: studying computer coding and robotics. But the artist, who identifies as nonbinary, is no Steve Wozniak, which works to their advantage. The jankiness of their sculptures locates the uncanny intersection of absurdist humor and creepiness. Across from the log cabin at *Year Zero* was *Sleeping Vampire,* which features thermoplastic figures dressed as Jesus Christ and Santa Claus resting on burial mounds. What's exciting about McGuire's work is its unpredictability. Unlike the King's Leap show, with all its gizmos, *Year Zero* is almost rustic. "I've never been interested in making the same thing again, because then it loses the challenge," the artist says. Whatever McGuire does next, it will be sure to surprise you. –TAL ROSENBERG | 📷 L.F.

THE PASTRY PRODIGY

Tatum Sinclair

Tatum Sinclair's first job out of culinary school was as a line cook under Stephen Gillanders at the now-shuttered Intro. She worked hard and fast and kept to herself. "What do you do outside of work?" Gillanders finally asked her one day. "I go to bakeries," Sinclair answered. How many had she been to? "Eighty-six." There was a spreadsheet on her phone.

The next day, Gillanders moved her to the pastry station, and Sinclair's obsession became her life's work. After a two-year stint in New York City, she returned to Chicago in 2017 to help Gillanders open S.K.Y. on a shoestring budget. "I wasn't trying to make the best desserts but make them just simple and delicious," she recalls. Her banana budino and other sweet and savory goods helped the restaurant become a hit, and she joined Gillanders as he opened more spots. From her black truffle puff bread at Apolonia to her Whole Lemon (a Pavlova that uses all parts of the fruit) at Valhalla, her creations stood out.

Sinclair, 29, will soon have a stage to herself. Haven, which will likely launch this spring in West Town, will be backed by Gillanders but is Sinclair's baby. During the day she'll serve coffee and carryout pastries; at night the place will transform into a dessert-tasting counter. The early seating will have a six-course menu (pricing TBD, but possibly $68), and the later one will allow guests to indulge in as many as 12 (possibly $120). "It's a small space, and ideally we'd like to do it like an omakase, but I'm still trying to figure it out," Sinclair says. Expect to see variations of her signature sweets, such as seasonal Pavlovas, but don't count out humbler creations. As we talk at Valhalla, she pulls a batch of chocolate chip cookies from the oven and sprinkles them with flaky sea salt. She passes a couple—crisp but melting and barely able to contain their butter—across the counter, a gesture she will no doubt repeat many times once Haven opens. –JOHN KESSLER | 📷 E.J.

→

Kyle Fletcher doesn't seem like much of a villain. The 26-year-old pro wrestler has a boyish face and speaks with an endearing Aussie accent. But last fall, he turned Judas. In a pay-per-view for All Elite Wrestling, Fletcher transformed into a full-fledged bad guy (a "heel turn" in wrestling parlance), taking a screwdriver to the back of the head of his longtime mentor, Will Ospreay, which has led to some of the most gripping bouts you'll ever see. Forget Fletcher's charm: He was born to play the baddie.

With every increasingly high-profile match, Fletcher has received more screen time on *AEW Dynamite*, the flagship weekly show of All Elite Wrestling on TBS and Max. All the while, he is emerging as one of the most technically proficient and charismatic pro wrestlers on any circuit, demonstrating highflying moves that evoke the video game *Street Fighter*. (His signature maneuver involves climbing to the top rope with an opponent, turning him over, then dropping him headfirst straight onto the corner turnbuckle.) Now add to that his character work as a heel—he shaved his head on live TV to illustrate his newfound dastardly persona—and this may be the year AEW entrusts Fletcher with championship gold. "I have this internal feeling that I'm supposed to be the best at this," he tells me at the gym in Palatine where he trains.

Fletcher, an Australian native who wrestled out of the U.K. for a while, moved here in 2023, when he bought a house in Schaumburg with his partner, Skye Blue, a fellow up-and-coming wrestler and a Chicago native. (Part of Chicago's allure, says Fletcher, who often travels twice a week for AEW, is the convenience of O'Hare: "I've had no layovers in the last three months.") His ring performances have won him plenty of cred among wrestling die-hards he runs into around town. "They're just lovely, every interaction I've had," Fletcher says. "Even if they're booing me." –KEVIN PANG | 📷 L.F.

THE WRESTLING HEEL

Kyle Fletcher

THE BATTERY BUILDER

Spencer

Sodium is everywhere. It’s in our oceans and our food. And on a frigid, sunny day in early January, it is sprinkled all over the icy sidewalks of West Town, crunching with every step I take toward an unlabeled warehouse not far from Fulton Market that serves as the R&D site of the startup Bedrock Materials. If cofounder Spencer Gore’s vision comes to fruition, one day your car will be powered by sodium, too.

“If you break out a periodic table,” Gore tells me inside, “sodium is in the same column as lithium.” In other words, the two have similar behavioral properties. Problem is, lithium — the stuff used to make today’s EV batteries — is a thousand times rarer, making electric cars expensive to produce. “Until you can get a great EV for less than the price of a Toyota Camry, the job’s not done,” Gore says. That’s exactly what he hopes to facilitate by designing a scalable sodium-ion battery. No wonder, then, that Bedrock secured $9 million in seed funding last May and has signed letters of intent with two of the world’s six major battery producers.

The Naperville North grad has never shied from risk taking. During an internship at Tesla, he lived out of a 1983 mini motor home, calculating that the only way he could afford to work on the Model 3 battery while finishing up his undergrad degree was to camp in the company parking lot. Last May, Gore, 32, took another gamble by relocating Bedrock, which he launched in 2023, from Silicon Valley to Chicago. Returning to his hometown was a perk, but it was also a business decision: Argonne National Laboratory in Lemont has long been a hub of battery innovation. “There are more battery scientists per capita here than in just about the rest of the country,” Gore says. It’s one reason he’s already thinking bigger: “My mission is to turn Illinois and Chicago into as much of an energy and battery technology startup ecosystem as I possibly can.” –STANLEY KAY | 📷 E.J.

Gore

THE COMING-OF-AGE FILMMAKER

Minhal Baig

"Everything I'm doing right now feels miraculous," says filmmaker Minhal Baig. Consider the run she's been on. *We Grown Now*, Baig's lyrical study of two boys coming of age in early-'90s Cabrini-Green, hit theaters nationwide last year following its premiere at the 2023 Toronto International Film Festival, where it won a Changemaker Award for its social message, and had its streaming rights picked up by Netflix. Baig landed a writing gig for Amazon's upcoming adaptation of the comic-book noir series *Criminal*. (She has also written for the acclaimed animated series *BoJack Horseman*.) And last February she gave birth to her first child.

Growing up in Rogers Park, Baig, the daughter of Pakistani immigrants, would visit a now-defunct multiplex at the Lincoln Village shopping center to see Bollywood films; her cinephile father introduced her to American classics, such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. It was at Yale, where she studied painting and playwriting, that she began to consider turning her passion for movies into a career. "Filmmaking married my interest in narrative storytelling with visual arts," Baig says. *We Grown Now*, which was lauded by critics, made for a poetic follow-up to her breakthrough feature, *Hala*, another bildungsroman shot in Chicago (including at her alma mater, Northside College Prep). Focused on a Muslim teenager at odds with her conservative immigrant parents, it debuted to acclaim at Sundance in 2019 and was later picked up by Apple TV+.

On deck: filming her latest screenplay. The Hyde Park resident won't divulge much about it, except to say it's not set in Chicago. "It's really different from anything I've made before — a lot bigger, and featuring adult characters, adult needs. That's kind of new for me. I'm excited to explore things closer to my experience now that I'm in my 30s." In other words, she grown now. –WEB BEHRENS | 📷 L.F.

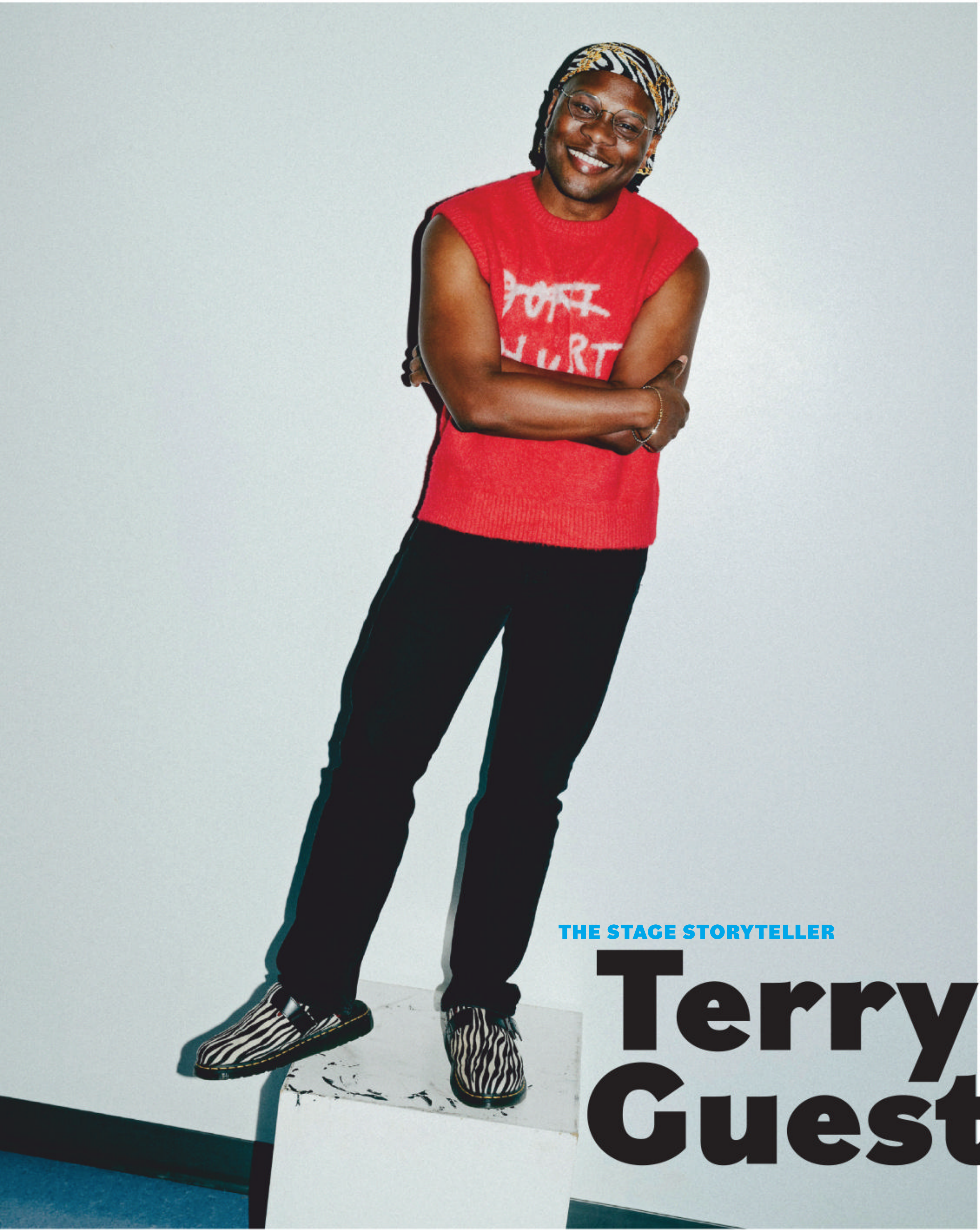
→

Growing up, Terry Guest dreamed of becoming Whitney Houston. "A well-dressed, gorgeous, singing-and-acting diva beloved by all," he says matter-of-factly. Then, in middle school, around the same time Guest realized his dream might be hard to achieve, he took a musical theater class. "It all clicked," he recalls. "I could utilize my interests in a practical sense."

Guest, 34, might not be Whitney, but he has emerged as one of Chicago theater's most compelling multihyphenates — an actor-director-playwright whose work is gaining national traction. *Oak,* his Southern gothic horror play, finished a successful run in Sarasota, Florida, last year and will be staged in Indianapolis and Buffalo before debuting in Chicago this fall as part of the National New Play Network's Rolling World Premiere program. Meanwhile, his adaptation of *Milo Imagines the World* for Chicago Children's Theatre is touring to Minneapolis and Omaha.

Drawn by Chicago's vibrant theater scene, Guest moved here nine years ago from Atlanta to further his acting career. But breaking in wasn't easy: He went three years without landing a single gig. So he turned to writing and began self-producing readings of his work. His breakthrough came in 2019 with *At the Wake of a Dead Drag Queen*, a play he wrote, produced, and starred in for the Story Theatre. "That play was deeply personal and incredibly scary to share," Guest says. "But it also felt like the moment I could show people what I had to offer as both an artist and a writer."

Now a three-time Jeff Award winner, Guest blends historical fiction with ancestral imagination, offering fresh perspectives on overlooked stories. "I'm find myself most interested in reimagining where Black and queer people fit into American history." Next up: He's under commission at Goodman Theatre to write *Nightbirds*, a musical inspired by William Dorsey Swann, a Reconstruction-era Black drag queen. Says Guest: "I have more stories to tell than I have time." –JUDY SUTTON TAYLOR | 📷 L.F.



THE STAGE STORYTELLER

Terry Guest

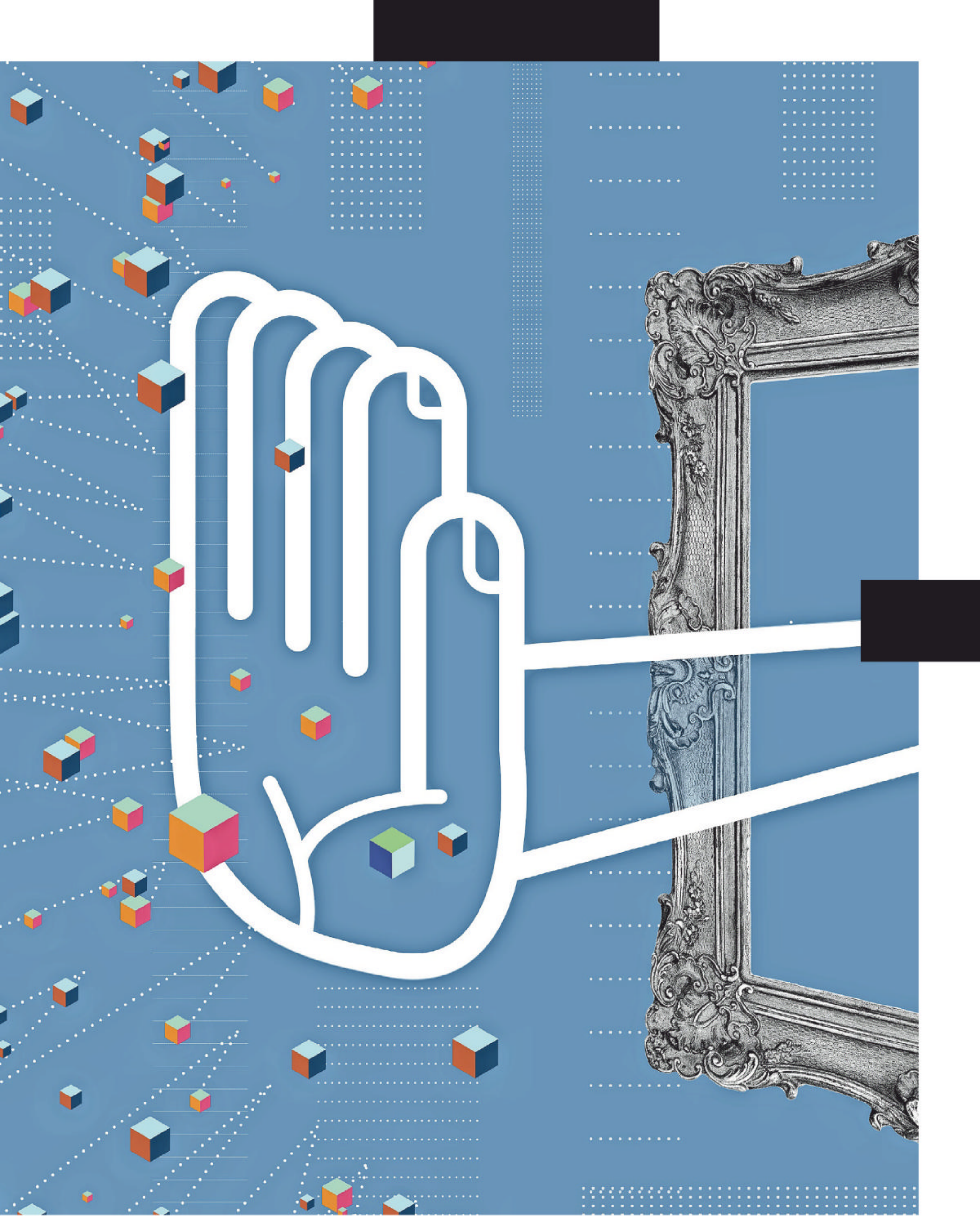
THE GREAT AI ART HEIST

A lab at the University of Chicago is protecting artists from theft by a new adversary: the machines.

BY KELLEY ENGELBRECHT

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN HERSEY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAVERIO TRUGLIA



IT BEGAN

with a proverbial pebble at the peak of a proverbial mountain. And it's why, in the darkness of a Chicago winter's night, I am transfixed by a virtual menagerie of fantastical creatures

A winged, three-headed beast breathes blue fire across an arctic tundra. A man-spider, with a bulbous red body, eight hairy legs, and an armor-clad human torso, hovers above an altar stacked high with human skulls and burning candles. A headless mer-creature is swallowed up by a wall, its hands clawing at the wallpaper while a silvery finned tail glistens under a pendant lamp. A landscape blooms across the page in blues and purples, castles overturned and covered by the mist of magic.

I am firmly in the world of Kim Van Deun, a Belgian artist who, after getting her master's in biology and PhD in veterinary sciences, left academia to dedicate herself to illustration. It's easy to surmise that her specialty is fantasy, something she confirms once we begin to email back and forth. When she was a kid, she says, her brother came home with *The Dark*

U. of C. Professor Ben Zhao has led SAND Lab's efforts to thwart AI that exploits artists.

Shawn Shan, a PhD student, coded the algorithm behind SAND Lab's Glaze. He says he isn't worried about blowback from Big Tech companies: "There's so much at stake, my personal risk is less important."

Eye, a role-playing video game similar to *Dungeons & Dragons*. She found the illustrations of goblins and kobolds intoxicating: "I only wanted to know how you could draw things like that and spend your life dreaming up such monsters."

Van Deun was able to push that childhood idea aside for years, she says, until it was "beginning to yell and throwing a ruckus in my head." So she walked away from the promise of a steady paycheck and a pension to pursue the thing that she felt she was meant to do.

It didn't take long for her to realize that generative artificial intelligence was going to be trouble – or that it would, at the very least, change everything – for independent artists. It was 2022, and generative AI models like ChatGPT were beginning to pique mainstream interest. The app Lensa AI had dazzled social media with the allure of summoning up instantaneous portraits of whomever you wanted, in any style you wanted. No one seemed to be thinking about how it manufactured such creations.

A couple of years earlier, Van Deun had found Fawkes, an image-cloaking software that protects personal privacy against unregulated facial recognition technology. Van Deun, who says she is "very shy," was looking for ways to shelter the photos of herself that she uploaded to her website. It got her wondering if Fawkes might be able to do for her art what it did for a photograph of her face: give it some level of protection. She decided to cold-email its creators at the University of Chicago's Security, Algorithms, Networking and Data Lab and ask.

And with that, the proverbial pebble – tottering and tenacious – tipped over the mountaintop and started to pick up speed.

When artist Greg Rutkowski Googled his name, the images populating the page weren't ones he had created, but rather copycats generated by AI. "Fake works, signed by my name," he told an artists' town hall.

IT'S 9:30 A.M. ON A MONDAY in October, and with the exception of Professor Ben Zhao, SAND Lab is empty. Housed in the John Crerar Library, a decidedly modern building among the neo-Gothic ones typical on the U. of C. campus, the lab is austere, almost monastic, with rows of white desks that will soon be occupied by students – no more than a dozen PhDs, and perhaps a handful of undergraduates and high school researchers – working on laptops. Large windows fill the room with sunlight. It's what you'd expect from any academic space, save for the plentiful art on the walls.

On one of the desks sits a small but hefty trophy. "You're the first to see it," Zhao, 49, tells me with a smile. He's just come back from Pasadena, California, where he accepted the Concept Art Association's Community Impact Award on behalf of the lab for its work in developing two tools that have made it famous among artists and their advocates: Glaze and Nightshade, software programs that give artists a fighting chance against a growing adversary.

I can tell Zhao is proud. It's been two years since the CAA hosted a town hall in response to its members' growing concerns over the impact of generative AI – which means it's been two years since Zhao raised his hand and offered up the lab's expertise.

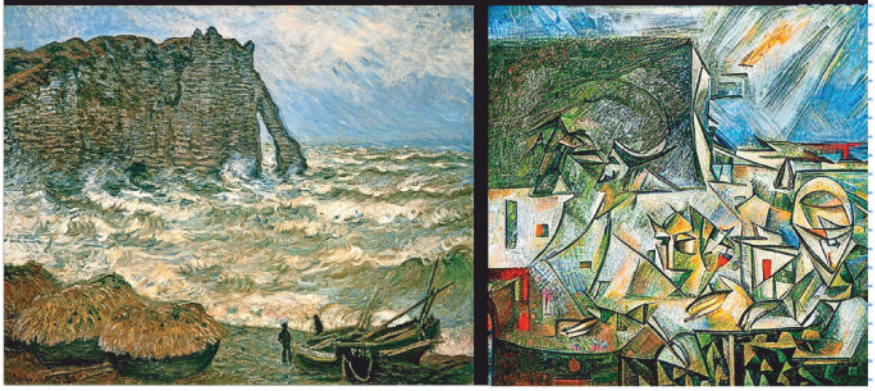
Back in 2022, when Van Deun emailed the lab and found out that Fawkes, in fact, could not work for her art the way she'd hoped, she told the team there about the upcoming meeting. Maybe they could join? As a former academic herself, Van Deun was working off a hunch that if she dangled a problem in front of a group of researchers, they'd be curious enough to stick around and learn more.

Zhao happened to be free that day, so he joined the virtual town hall, hosted by artist Karla Ortiz. A recording of it is still on YouTube and serves as a reminder of both the nascent state of generative AI, already slippery and rapidly evolving, and a crucial moment of reckoning. Watching the video, I get the sense that Ortiz and the other artists were simply trying to disseminate as much information as possible to their peers, in hope of determining some kind of path forward.

At one point, Ortiz showed a chart of the main players in generative AI, all of which use large data sets to train their models. Stability AI, the chart noted, relied on an open-source set named LAION-5B. At the time, LAION-5B had already scraped over 5.8 billion images from the internet. (LAION has said it is simply indexing links, not storing the images.) And because Stability AI had used the images for commercial purposes, it was participating in what Ortiz called data laundering: employing copyrighted data and private artworks to feed the machine in an ostensibly lawful way, leaving the original owners little legal recourse.

Halfway through the meeting, Ortiz introduced Greg Rutkowski, an artist whose work has been commissioned for iconic games like *Magic: The Gathering* and *Dungeons & Dragons*. About three months before, his fans had started reaching out to him. Did he know that

Glaze is one of two programs SAND Lab created to hinder AI models from using artists' work without permission or compensation. The Glaze software prevents style mimicry. Take the example below, in which Glaze is applied to Claude Monet's *Stormy Sea at Étretat* before it's uploaded to the internet. To the human eye, the painting still looks like the original (left), in the French artist's impressionist style, but AI models perceive an entirely different style — cubism (right).



IMAGES: COURTESY OF SAND LAB

his name was being used as a generative AI prompt? He didn't. But when he Googled his name, the images populating the page weren't ones he had created, but rather copycats generated by AI. "Fake works, signed by my name," he told those gathered.

The experiences other artists at the town hall shared varied in scope, but the stark reality was the same: AI was stealing their work. It was taking away jobs. It was eroding their livelihoods.

By the time the discussion was opened for questions, Zhao was first in line. He wanted to help, he said. He brought up the lab, the work it had done with Fawkes, and suggested a few ideas, including a tool that would turn art into digital junk when it was scraped into a data set.

"Perhaps you guys would like a more cooperative role with the model – for example, you could track how much of your art was trained into the model and therefore you know how much profit could be headed back to you," he offered. Ortiz smiled. A few months later, in January 2023, she would file a class-action lawsuit (still pending) with two other artists against Midjourney, Stability AI, DeviantArt, and Runway AI.

But first, Ortiz suggested another idea. One that was a little more proactive. Fun, even. "I would love a tool that if someone wrote my name and made it into a prompt, bananas would come out."

> ***If generative AI models were going to continue to train on images without consent, Nightshade would make sure those images would teach the machines unexpected and unpredictable behavior. If Glaze was built to be a defensive tool, Nightshade was designed to go on the attack.***

IT WASN'T ALL BAD. AT least not at first. Before 2022, in Zhao's view, AI was mostly a good thing. The professor seems like the kind of person who believes in good things. But when the good things sour, he's not the kind of person who sits idly by. His X feed is filled with posts and reposts about generative AI that attempt to expose and debunk the mainstream hype surrounding the technology. Or at least it was. In November, Zhao departed the platform formerly known as Twitter ("Left this dumpster fire," his inactive profile reads). This is also to say that Zhao doesn't spend time in the murky middle. He picks sides.

Zhao is a professor of computer science at the U. of C., a post he's held since 2017. He came to Chicago by way of the University of California, Santa Barbara, along with his wife, Professor Heather Zheng, with whom he leads SAND Lab.

But before all that, Zhao was an undergraduate student at Yale who liked to wake up early and walk across campus in the quiet morning hours to the university's art museum. Usually it would be only him and the security guards, and he'd soak in the majesty of the masterpieces. Years later, in 2017, when he announced that he and Zheng were relocating from Santa Barbara to Chicago, he wrote in a post on the knowledge-sharing platform Quora that among the reasons they were making the move was the access to art and culture here: "For me personally, I can practically LIVE in the Art Institute with [our two daughters]. Heather could bring us food to keep us alive." A computer scientist first and foremost, but a computer scientist who genuinely loves art.

This was back when one could safely assume that art was being made by humans, and when AI was not just mostly good but ethical, even. When AI largely meant machine learning and deep neural network models (the kind of technology that trained self-driving cars).

But once generative AI went mainstream in 2022, the balance shifted. Suddenly it was possible, with a few keyboard strokes, to create pictures of anything, in any style, including crisp, detailed, photo-like images. That the technology seemed to be getting smarter by the minute only added to the hype – and the money followed. Billions of dollars have been poured into technology that's steamrolling independent visual artists, voice actors, photographers, writers, and others.

All this masks a simple truth: Generative AI isn't actually all that smart. "It's truly the most useless of AI things," Zhao tells me, leaning back in his chair. "It just really is." There's a frustrated resignation in his voice. The kind of resignation that comes when you've screamed yourself hoarse and no one's listening.

It's important, then, to understand how we got here. Generative AI first took off with the advent of large language models, or LLMs, which allow a user to type a prompt or question into a chatbot and receive a written response. Ask ChatGPT for an itinerary for your trip to Italy, and it will generate a schedule based exclusively on probability. Zhao is quick to remind me – in a way that makes me think he's had to remind a lot of people – that apps like ChatGPT are far from sentient. When you feed one all the answers to all the questions that exist on the internet, it's easy to get compelling, if not particularly groundbreaking, answers. Even where to get the perfect cappuccino in Rome. But, Zhao points out, “it literally does not know anything.”

To understand how generative AI evolved to produce images from text prompts, you have to go back to 2017, when machine learning was the main focus of AI research, which manifested as image classification: *This is a statue. This is a cat.* That kind of thing. Then, after LLMs were popularized, something called text-to-image diffusion models entered the mainstream.

Zhao makes his hands into fists and holds them in front of him. “Imagine two balls connected by a skinny connector,” he begins. “One ball represents everything we understand about how words relate to each other. The other ball represents visual features like color, shape, and texture.”

These diffusion models learn how to put the pieces together, using large data sets filled with images scraped from the internet. So when you ask a program like Midjourney to give you a picture of a cat, it has been trained to make sense of an anticipated pattern: whiskers, ears, fur. Maybe even a collar with a bell. Like LLMs, these diffusion models aren’t particularly smart – they’re just really good at understanding how data is arranged. And that’s because they’ve been trained on billions of images from all corners of the web.

This is what generative AI is: an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the rules that inform data and patterns. It’s also the aggregate of decades of research, which means it’s not just one thing, but a series of things that, combined, create a technology that’s perceived as magic. That there are so many components is also what makes it easy to mess with.

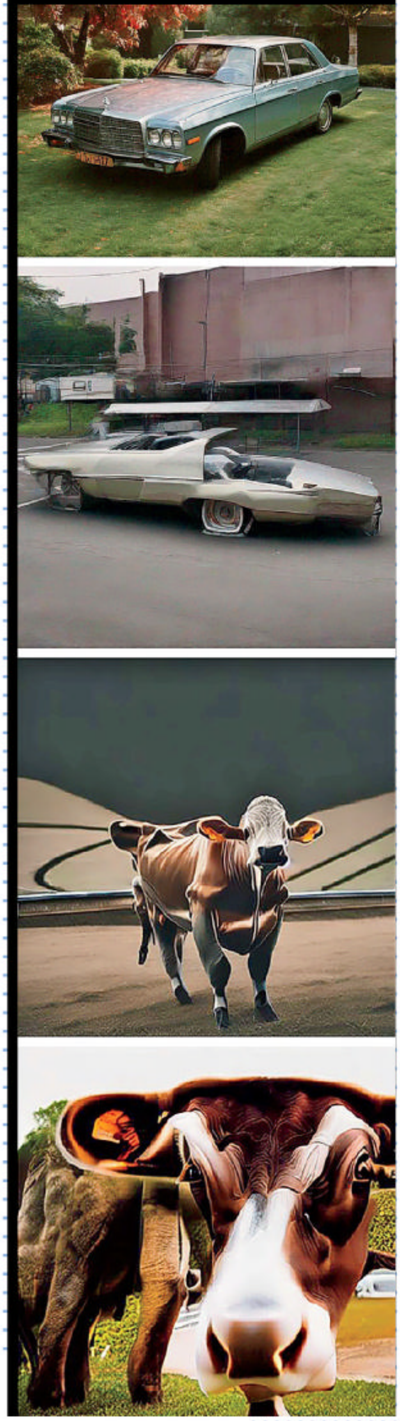
Take the self-driving car, for example. A lot goes into making sure the car drives accurately, that it stays on the road and doesn’t hit people. There’s complex technology (like deep neural networks), but there’s also the more straightforward tech, such as the camera that relays critical information to the car’s computer. If you mess with the camera by, say, covering up a stop sign at an intersection, it doesn’t matter how sophisticated the computer is. If it’s getting bad information, things will go wrong.

AFTER A STRING OF unanswered emails, I’m finally on the phone with Shawn Shan, a PhD student at the U. of C. I’ve called him to talk about the work he’s doing on generative AI (or “*exploitive* generative AI,” as he gently corrects me) at SAND Lab, and I quickly realize that Shan wasn’t ignoring my interview requests. He just gets a lot of them. Both Shan and Zhao have been exceptionally busy this past year, presenting at conferences and giving talks. Zhao recorded a TED Talk in San Francisco in October. Around the same time, Shan was in Germany, delivering a keynote address about their work at the media conference Medientage München. Shortly before that, he was named *MIT Technology Review*’s Innovator of the Year for his work on Glaze and Nightshade.

Shan, 27, has been with SAND Lab since he was an undergraduate. In 2017, after hearing Zhao give a lecture about drones, 3D, and AI, Shan sent him an email asking if they could work together. Usually it’s difficult for an undergraduate to get a research position in a lab like Zhao’s, but Zhao was new to the university and hadn’t built up his bench yet. Shan was in the right place at the right time, and he was immediately hooked: “I all but stopped going to classes and just stayed in the lab doing research.”

At the time, Zhao and Shan’s research was focused on security and AI. Soon enough, they were developing the image-cloaking technology that would eventually become Fawkes. In June 2022, after Van Deun emailed the lab, it was Shan who put the CAA town hall on Zhao’s calendar. And after the two decided to jump into the fight against

Nightshade disrupts AI models by attacking their basic functionality. An AI model is trained using images scraped from data sets, so by manipulating those images, Nightshade can trick it into thinking that one object is actually another — for instance, that a car is a cow. As Nightshade is applied to more and more images of cars, the model will start incorporating them when prompted to generate an image of a car. Over time, the more such images there are in the data sets, the more distorted — and more cow-like — the model’s creations will get.



IMAGES: COURTESY OF SAND LAB

generative AI, it was Shan who coded the algorithm behind their first software program meant to fool it.

Zhao and Shan had studied the technology that went into generative AI images and realized that if they could mess with the model training process, they could break the whole system. Put another way: AI machines and the human eye see things differently, so pixel-level changes to images, while largely imperceptible to humans, could drastically alter what the generative AI models interpret and classify. That became the basis for Glaze, the first such tool that SAND Lab released (it can be downloaded free from the lab's website). This was in March 2023, just four months after the town hall.

Artists can run Glaze on their images before uploading them to the internet. The software makes changes to each pixel, shifting what the generative AI models perceive. For example, an image that has been Glazed could be seen by human eyes as impressionism but as cubism by the generative AI models. If someone then attempts to use an artist's name as a prompt, Glaze ensures the output looks completely different from the artist's style.

> ***"AI really depends on the future of human artists," Zhao says. "And it's destroying its own future because it's destroying the pipeline."***

When Zhao announced Glaze's arrival, the response from artists was immediate and enthusiastic. Ortiz, who had given the team her entire catalog to test out the software, soon tweeted an image of one of her paintings, the first ever to have been Glazed. Fittingly, she called it *Musa Victoriosa* (Victorious Muse), and today it hangs at SAND Lab. Since then, Glaze has been downloaded more than 5 million times.

The success felt good. But it was soon evident that protecting artists at an individual level wouldn't solve the greater problem of the nonconsensual scraping of images. While SAND Lab researchers had figured out how to confuse generative AI machines, they came to realize there was an opportunity to aim even higher by damaging the data sets used to train the models.

Nightshade, released in early 2024, took a more collective approach. If generative AI models were going to continue to train on images without consent, Nightshade would make sure those images would teach the machines unexpected and unpredictable behavior. If Glaze was built to be a defensive bulwark, Nightshade was designed to go on the attack.

Take an image of a cat. Apply Nightshade to the image, and the AI model will see not a cat but something entirely different – perhaps a chair. Do this to enough images of cats, and gradually the model stops seeing cats and sees only chairs. Ask the same model to generate a picture of a cat, and you get an overstuffed high-back chair instead, maybe even with scrolled wooden feet. While Glaze provides immediate protection on individual images, Nightshade, which has been downloaded more than 2 million times, plays the long game. It poisons the well one image at a time.

I **HAVE THIS MEMORY FROM** my childhood. I'm 7, maybe 8, and I'm erasing pencil drawings out of a small, clothbound notebook that I've had since kindergarten. I'm filled with frustration, even shame, as I press my eraser down as hard as I can, determined to redo what I had drawn earlier: ugly, misshapen figures – bulbous heads, uneven arms. As a 5-year-old, I'd had no awareness, but at least two years older, I now know better. I've learned scale and proportion and need to make things right.

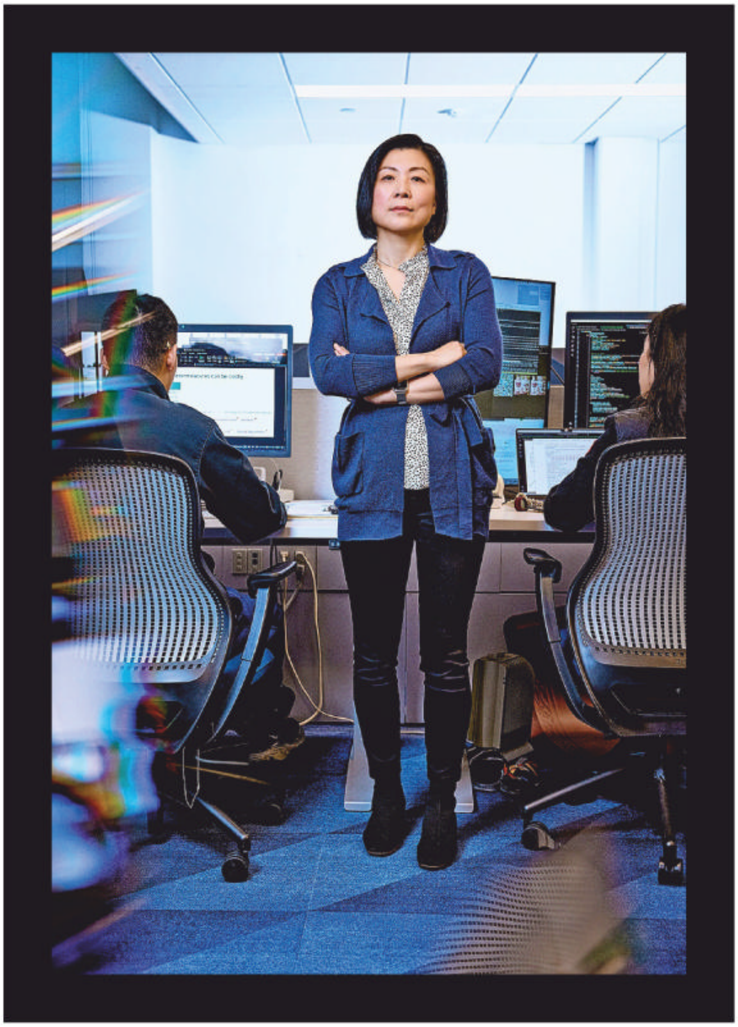
This is my first memory of perfectionism – or more accurately, of what Ira Glass has called "the gap," that space between what you want to create and your ability to create it. Even then, I knew that had there been something to close that gap, I would have lunged for it. In so many ways, this is the promise of generative AI.

Concerns about what technology does to creativity are hardly new. When photography arrived on the scene two centuries ago, the panic was similar. What would happen to the painted portrait now that someone could sit for a photograph? Today we know that those fears were unfounded, that photography only enhanced the ways in which artists experimented and pushed creativity. But there's this thing about generative AI that makes it different from photography – and really from any technology that's touched the creative process to date. It eliminates the blank page. I'll admit, I hate the lone blinking cursor just like I hated the struggle of not being able to draw what I really wanted to draw as a kid. But it's worth wondering what happens when we remove the friction from generating those first, oftentimes terrible, ideas.

My friend Jordan Hetzer is a graphic designer in New York City. He regularly uses Midjourney – and he also happens to be one of the most creative people I know. When I ask him if he feels any tension over using generative AI, he shakes his head. "These are aesthetics that aren't anybody's. You can easily rip off someone, or you can build off of their aesthetic, massaging it until it feels like something entirely new." As Mark Twain supposedly put it, there is no such thing as a new idea.

I'm inclined to agree with the sentiment. It doesn't deny the existence of creative evolution but acknowledges that our creativity is the aggregate of all that's around us and everything that has come before us. Famously, Picasso copied the styles of other painters as a young artist in Paris; the 1907 retrospective of Paul Cezanne at the Salon d'Automne radically influenced how he thought about form. But I can't shake the idea that even as Picasso mimicked and copied, first he had to physically pick up a paintbrush.

Practically, removing this starting point – or rather, moving it past the messy scratched-out-and-erased beginning – is already having an impact on creative jobs. Hetzer, an art director, uses generative AI to give him what, as recently as five years ago, a junior designer would have. Why wait for your subordinate to draft 30 ideas for logos when you can get those in minutes from a machine? By saving him time, generative AI helps him get to the good stuff faster. But this makes the state of careers in the arts tenuous, as entry-level positions are gradually eliminated. Art schools are closing. Young artists are changing careers. A whole generation of the creative class is slowly being erased.



The stakes are high, says U. of C. Professor Heather Zheng, the lab's co-leader: "If you lose faith in [art], how do you continue creativity from a human perspective?"

After the shortcut becomes the only route, what will feed the machine? It's something Zhao has been thinking about a lot lately. "There's an interdependence with AI," Zhao tells me as students start to trickle into the lab. "AI really depends on the future of human artists. And it's destroying its own future because it's destroying the pipeline."

A few days earlier, during a Zoom call with me, Zheng held up a homemade poster. In the middle was a white square with a small human figure curled up in a ball. The background was black with "AI" in large, bright red letters. On top of the letters, in kelly green: "Don't Generate My Life." Zheng smiled. It's the work of one of Zhao and Zheng's daughters, created for a school assignment to draw something meaningful in her life. I could see Zheng is proud. The poster was born out of conversations they've been having as a family, but these words, this way of thinking of the bigger impact of AI, didn't come from the parents. These were from the kids.

For Zhao and Zheng, it's all connected – their work in the lab, their family, the problems they seek to solve. Zheng tells me that they regularly get inspiration from their everyday lives. A few years ago, when Zhao considered adding a smart speaker to his shared office with Zheng, she told him no. She had concerns about privacy, specifically that these speakers were, by default, always listening and recording. But instead of Zheng's rejection closing the door, it made way for a new problem to solve. Could they unplug the device when not in use? No, there's still a battery. Could they develop some kind of cover? That wouldn't work either. Instead, Zheng, Zhao, and their SAND Lab, along with U. of C.'s Human Computer Integration Lab, developed the Bracelet of Silence, a wearable piece of technology that disables microphones in the immediate surroundings. If smart speakers could become a worthy opponent, why wouldn't generative AI serve as a career-defining adversary?

"We only see generative AI in our very mature age," Zheng told me, putting away the poster. "But kids, they're being served all this information – the majority of it fake and generative – and it's hard for them to see their role in it. Why bother to study art? If you lose faith in that, how do you continue creativity from a human perspective?"

I think about the already tenuous state of arts funding, especially for schools, and realize that in the naive, perhaps misplaced, excitement for generative AI, we've lost this critical piece of the narrative. But as Zheng sees it, kids don't necessarily need us to recognize the bleak future that's being created – slowly they're beginning to understand what's happening. At least a few of them are. Last year, a group of

(Continued on page 92)

CHOOSE YOUR OWN SPA DAY

CREAKY JOINTS?

PREPPING FOR A BIG EVENT?

WHATEVER AILS OR INTRIGUES YOU,

WE CAN HELP YOU DECIDE ON THE PERFECT TREATMENT.

BY KELLY AIGLON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY EVAN SHEEHAN

The Pain Relievers

I HAVE HEAD AND NECK TENSION

CUPPING AND MASSAGE at ALLYU SPA

Goose Island

I didn't have "Get Octopus Suctioned to My Back" on my bingo card this year, but that's exactly what cupping feels like. LaShauna and I are in a dim treatment room as she applies silicone suckers to my trapezius, moving them in rhythm with the chakra chants murmuring from speakers. "You've got good blood flow," she declares. I ask her how she knows, wondering if her skills include X-ray vision. "Your back is turning red at the places I'm cupping, which means blood is rising up." That's the point of cupping therapy: to increase circulation near bunched-up and stuck-together muscles so they break apart, easing pain. It's particularly helpful for those sinewy muscles in the shoulders and neck, which, in my case, have taken a beating from poor posture. Cupping dates back to ancient Egypt, when it involved glass cups heated by flaming sticks (the heat made the cups act as suctions). Allyu takes a modern approach, using silicone cups, which, by nature of their shape and pliability, can summon the same vacuum force. Plus, they're softer. That allows LaShauna to use them as massage tools after oiling my back. When they glide over especially gnarly muscles, the stretch from the suction becomes almost too much to bear. At one point, I realize I have four cups on my upper back, barnacle-style. Then, at just the right moment, they *pffft* off, one by one, like an open-mouthed kiss of a pufferfish. The pain release is instantaneous, and I feel downright euphoric when LaShauna applies a hot towel as a finishing touch. **Tip:** Arrive early to chill in the textile-spangled relaxation tent, which looks like it was plucked from a garden in Jaipur. *$140 for 60 minutes; $200 for 90 minutes. 600 W. Chicago Ave.*

MY BODY IS SORE

I like being basted with oils

POOL SOAK AND CBD MASSAGE at KOHLER WATERS SPA

Lincoln Park

Reflecting the brand's reign in the bathroom fixture kingdom, Kohler spas are best known for hydrotherapy treatments. For those, you should take a road trip to Kohler, Wisconsin, where you'll have access to a waterfall pool and a sauna with a Himalayan salt wall. But for something closer to home, there's the Lincoln Park location. Here, the company offers a hydromassage pool: a coed pool (bring your swimsuit) with jets and spouts that pummel and relieve sore muscles. It's included with any treatment and is a great prelude to the CBD massage, in which your therapist smooths cannabidiol oil onto your skin. You can ask for unscented, but I prefer the aromatherapy blend of lemongrass, eucalyptus, peppermint, and bergamot. CBD, found in the cannabis plant, can offer relief from tight muscles or injuries by interacting with receptors in the endocannabinoid system, which regulates pain perception. I usually sleep very well the night of my massage, and within a few days any remaining muscle pain has been flushed—fitting for a company that makes toilets. **Tip:** Don't take a shower for a few hours after. You want to give the oil time to permeate your skin. *$265 or $295 for 50 minutes; $315 or $345 for 80 minutes. 2358 N. Lincoln Ave.*

I'd rather keep my clothes on

THAI YOGA MASSAGE at ROSE THAI SPA

Naperville

There's bend-over-and-touch-your-toes stretching, and then there's Thai stretching. The practice involves a series of maneuvers that take your body to its flexibility limits and release muscle tension. Spa owner Tassanee "Rose" Fullone, who learned how to perform the therapy growing up in Thailand, pushes, kneads, and pulls you through muscle elongations that will leave you feeling like a human pretzel. You can choose a massage table or the floor. I find the floor more comfortable, and it gives Fullone the chance to kneel on your back, grinding into bunched-up muscles near your glutes. If you're game, she will even walk on your back with Cirque du Soleil ease. You'll leave feeling like a contortionist in your own right, but your limbs will thank you. **Tip:** Fullone advises drinking at least one glass of water beforehand and two to three after. Your muscles may be dehydrated from the stretching, which can lead to soreness, so think of H2O as WD-40 for the body. *$50 for 30 minutes to $179 for 120 minutes. 847 N. Center St*

OK, I'll at least take my shoes off

ACUPRESSURE FOOT MASSAGE at RELAX MAGIC

Fox Valley Mall, Aurora

I know what you're thinking: A foot massage at a mall? Let me set the record straight. No, this isn't at a kiosk, where teens hauling Forever 21 bags can ogle your stompers. And, no, this isn't some lure to draw you into a high-pressure sales pitch for a timeshare. What you *will* find here are talented masseuses that make quick work of alleviating aches and pains by pressing trigger points. A warm foot bath to start things off? Check. A deep knead into your arches to relieve those running kinks and maybe even send a message to your gut to play nice with last night's burger? Check. A hot towel wrapped over your legs, and a renewed belief in the pleasures of the American mall? Check and check. **Tip:** There are two locations at Fox Valley. The lower-level one (which goes by Health Magic) has glass chandeliers and velvet curtains that may entice you, but the less glam space tucked away on the upper level is where you want to be: Less noise and dimmer lighting make it cozier. *$10 for 10 minutes. 195 Fox Valley Center Dr.*

The De-stressors

I LIKE A HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

ACUPUNCTURE at MOON RABBIT ACUPUNCTURE

Lincoln Park and Near West Side

“Are they already all in?” I asked in disbelief. That’s how deft Gudrun Wu Snyder was with the 35 needles she’d tapped into my arms and legs and the crown of my head. Strategically placed at points connected to nerve passageways, they were intended to ease my ongoing anxiety. Everyone at this plant-dappled sanctuary, where library whispers are punctuated by the occasional gong from the adjoining sound bath studio, gets a tailored treatment. During a preliminary sit-down, Snyder asked about my sleep and other daily habits, then popped a game changer: “What is your tolerance for heat?” Turns out, if you enjoy a good burn, you’re in for a treat: Snyder placed burning mugwort (moxa) on the soles of my feet. The traditional Chinese medicine technique is used to improve circulation and combat pain throughout your body. And, yes, it does eventually feel like an inferno (you’re advised to cry uncle when you reach a 7 of 10 on the tolerance scale). The hands-on portion of the treatment completed, I lay alone for 20 minutes in the soft glow of candlelight, needled body basking in the rose-gardenia scent that Snyder spritzed in the air as she exited. “You’ll probably feel the effects of all of this immediately,” she purred. She wasn’t wrong. I practically floated back out to Armitage Avenue. **Tip:** Spring for the $35 tiny gold seeds (or the $45 Swarovski crystal ones, if you’re feeling fancy), which are adhered to your ear to provide pressure on key acupuncture points for up to a week. *$155 for initial 50-minute session; $140 for follow-up session. 1022 W. Armitage Ave.; 1111 W. Madison St.*

NO TOUCHING, PLEASE

I’m willing to do a little work

CONTRAST THERAPY at SWEATHOUZ

Old Town and Lake View East

Think of contrast therapy—alternately exposing yourself to heat and cold—as the yin and yang of the spa world: using opposite forces to create balance. The extreme temperature shifts increase your circulation, which releases endorphins that improve your mood. While you could technically MacGyver this type of situation at home, scurrying from hot bath to cold shower, SWTHZ (as it styles itself) puts a sophisticated spin on things, giving you an hour in your own private suite to dibble and dabble in various temperatures at your discretion. Camp out in the sauna that uses infrared radiation (heating the body directly, rather than the air around it), then rinse off in a shower of vitamin C–infused water to cool your skin down before plunging into an icy bath. This isn’t the type of spa experience where you can just sit back. You have to stay in tune with what your body is telling you to know when it’s time to get out of the extreme cold or heat. **Tip:** BYO tunes. Your suite doubles as an entertainment chamber with Bluetooth speakers. *$80 for 60 minutes. 1439 N. Wells St.; 3101 N. Clark St.*

I’d rather just lie there

SOUND BATH at RUBY ROOM

East Ukrainian Village

For the uninitiated, the combined tones of chimes, tuning forks, and crystal bowls can sound like a middle school orchestra. But if you are curious about alternative healing therapies and are content to lie on a mat and just “be” for an hour, you may find relief in the droning: It’s said that the body’s rhythms, like breathing and even brain waves, can synchronize with the sound waves. Upon arrival, you’ll be asked to choose a card from a deck—a card that represents a scent and a healing intent (for example, citrus to focus on increasing willpower). You’ll then receive a spritz of the scent. Whether or not that floats your mind-body boat, the real bathing begins when the guide leading you through the meditation starts playing the instruments. The sound of a gong at the end brings you back to earth. **Tip:** Wear comfortable clothes (the kind you’d take a catnap in) and don’t go on an empty stomach. Nothing ruins a group Zen session like intestinal growling. *$40 for 60 minutes. 1743 W. Division St.*

The Big-Night Preppers

I WANT MY NAILS TO SPARKLE

MANICURE at LENA ROSE
Lincoln Square
Owner Jenny Duranski worked for years as a nail tech before tiring of the fumes and opening her own studio devoted to natural products and services. No formaldehyde or phthalates here. Instead, she uses vegan nail polish and, for services like facials and peels, concocts her own line of serums, balms, and lotions with ingredients sourced from a local biodynamic farm. The “farm-to-table manicures,” as the staff refers to them, are quick, yet come with enticing twists, like aromatherapy-infused exfoliation and moisturizing. You also get nail shaping, cuticle care, a massage with pressure point therapy, and an herbal towel wrap for your hands. On a recent visit, I heard several drawls of “I love this for you” from an especially engaged technician going to town on a client’s nails. **Tip:** Try an out-of-the-box nail shape like coffin or stiletto. Techs have a handy illustrated card showing you how they will look on you. *$40 for 30 minutes. 4645 N. Rockwell St.*

I WANT TO FEEL ENERGIZED

I have limited time

B12 SHOT at SHOT BAR MEDSPA
Lincoln Park
For a quick prick-me-up, mainline an essential vitamin. Yes, this is literally a shot of 1.000 micrograms of B12, delivered in your upper arm and intended to accomplish a litany of nice things. Among them: improving energy and mood, decreasing stress, and boosting metabolism. Crossing all those things off your to-do list feels like a tall order (regular clients say they return weekly to keep their mojo). But as an avid B12 shot getter, I can attest to having more pep in my step for a few days. The injection doesn’t take any longer than a flu shot and is given in an individual exam room. Not to worry: The waiting lounge is more chic loft than hospital. **Tip:** Ask for dimmed lighting for a more spa-like vibe. *$25. 2444 N. Clark St.*

My schedule is clear

IV THERAPY at FREEZE & FLOAT SPA
River North
At this pharmacist-owned spa, IV therapies (administered by registered nurses) are the specialty. Unlike oral supplements, which lose potency as they move through the digestive system, vitamins delivered intravenously are fully absorbed by the body, meaning they leave you feeling immediately rejuvenated. Treatments take up to an hour, counting prep time. Start with the basic hydration drip, a saline solution with a smattering of electrolytes. But for just-took-a-dip-in-chilly-Lake-Michigan alertness, go for the Myers Cocktail drip, containing magnesium, B vitamins, calcium gluconate, and vitamin C. There are myriad benefits to these supplements, but just know this: It’s a real energizer. **Tip:** Don’t expect a cushy locker-room-and-lounge experience here. (You’ll be ushered to a chair with your street clothes on.) But you can ask for a blanket and a private room. *$95 to $220. 371 W. Ontario St.*

I WANT MY FACE TO GLOW

Freeze me

CRYO 3R FACIAL at THE PENINSULA SPA
Near North Side
Freezing is preservation, right? Turns out it can also act as a time machine to the past. The cryo treatment here involves ice-chilled glass instruments applied to your face in slow, upward sweeps to firm up the skin. You might think you could do this yourself bag of frozen peas, but it wouldn’t be nearly the same as having Tina—an aesthetician with almost 20 years of experience—do the honors. Another part of this facial was even more intriguing: something called a “remodeling face machine.” Tina was vague about how, specifically, this defibrillator-looking contraption would remodel my face and make it look more youthful, as promised. “It stimulates cells, lifts, and sculpts,” she repeated, no matter how many different ways I asked. “I’m going to move it from your décolletage up to your forehead, and you’re going to taste metal when I get close to your mouth.” The process was painless, and as Tina guided the device toward my jowls, I did indeed taste a hint of metal. Tina proceeded to cleanse, moisturize, and massage my face. I looked in the mirror to see a gal I knew about 10 years ago; she stuck around for about a week. **Tip:** Bring a swimsuit. When you book a service at the Peninsula, you also have complimentary access to the fitness center and pool. *$395 (Monday to Thursday) or $425 (Friday to Sunday) for 90 minutes. 108 E. Superior St.*

Peel me

LUNCHTIME PEEL AT THE WAX & SKIN LOUNGE

Logan Square and West Town

This efficient three-step quickie starts with an effervescent-feeling tonic dabbed on your face. Then comes the real fizz factor: An alpha hydroxy acid mask is applied to loosen up dead skin, which then gets peeled off. (If you're a glutton for grossness, ask to see the proof on the mask before they discard it.) A final hydrating serum seals the deal. Now back to work. **Tip:** Wear sunscreen after your treatment; your newly raw skin is more susceptible to UV damage. *$100 for 30 minutes. 2731 N. Milwaukee Ave.; 1021 W. Lake St.*

The Pamperers

I LIKE MY PRIVACY

Water me like a plant

NUTRIRE SIGNATURE HEAD SPA EXPERIENCE at TRICOCI SALON & SPA

Magnificent Mile

If you're one to escape to the shower for "me" time, you'll love this. It begins with you lying on a spa bed while your hair is shampooed and conditioned. Though the bliss might fade once you get to the scalp analysis (nothing spoils a party like finding out your follicles are unhealthy), that is what informs the treatments to follow, including red light therapy, which involves wearing a helmet that shines LED light on your scalp in an effort to reduce inflammation. After that sci-fi experience comes the pampering: warming hand mitts infused with herbs and a mini waterfall cascading on your head in rhythmic pulses (the moist heat is intended not only to refresh you but to increase blood flow to promote hair growth). With a quick blow-dry to top things off, this is the best shower you never had to lift a finger for. **Tip:** Avoid washing your hair for a few days after. That allows the nutrients in the shampoo and conditioner to sink in. *$250 for 80 minutes. 900 N. Michigan Ave.*

Butter me like a biscuit

BODY BUTTER MASSAGE at BETTYE O DAY SPA

Hyde Park

The idea of a slick rubdown isn't new; places around town integrate essential oils to make for a smoother, more luxurious massage. But Bettye O goes a step further, swapping shea butter in for oil to condition your skin. (Those with eczema swear by it.) It's an ideal treatment for those looking for good old-fashioned soothing; the light Swedish-style strokes combined with the soft shea butter are a recipe for relaxation. The body butter is warmed and dripped on your skin, making things feel even more decadent. When you have someone working on you this methodically, you can't help but feel babied. **Tip:** Grab lunch across the street. The sandwiches at Café 53 are legendary, especially the hummus and falafel wrap. *$105 for 60 minutes. 1424 E. 53rd St.*

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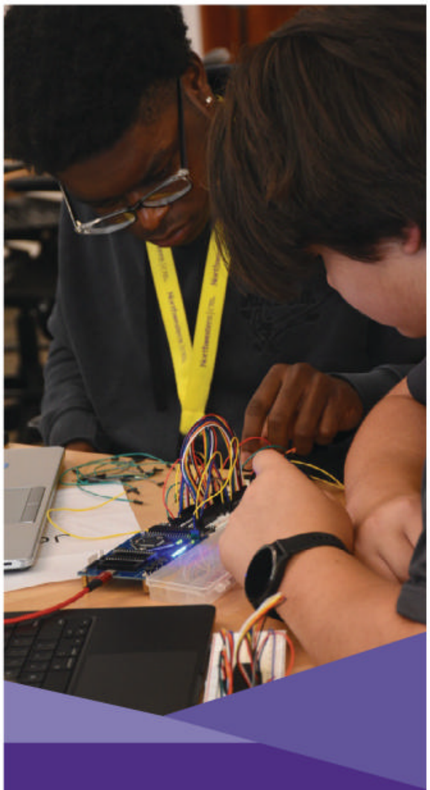
Hand me a beer and feed me cheese

BEER SOAK at PIVA BEER SPA

Noble Square

The idea of sitting in a tub of beer sounded as appealing as drinking Malört for breakfast. But after boning up on the cell-damage-reversing effects of polyphenols (found in brewing ingredients like hops), I was sold. My package included an oxygenating facial, during which my aesthetician, Ivana, strummed a bubbling mask onto my cheeks as if I were a human harp. It fizzed like Pop Rocks as it cleaned my pores. Next up: the salt room, in which molecules of medical-grade salt are pumped into the air. I buried my feet in the sand (that and the reclining chairs are meant to conjure a day at the beach) and let the sodium chloride do its anti-inflammatory work. After that, I shuffled from a short steam to a sauna. By this time, I was losing track of my robe, slippers, and towel and whether I should be clothed or unclothed. Luckily, Ivana was never far away in the maze of dim rooms and hallways. When she guided me to the holy grail—a foaming tub containing 15 to 20 percent Czech Pilsner—I was pleasantly delirious. It felt like a bubble bath: warm, fizzy, and floral-scented. But has your bubble bath ever come with a stein of ale and a cheese and fruit board? When I finally pulled myself out after 45 minutes, I felt truly content and doted on—especially when Ivana handed me the baggie with my underwear I'd left in a room somewhere. **Tip:** Bring a plus-one. The soak room has two tubs. *$175 for 75 minutes to $310 for 3 hours, 15 minutes. 1052 N. Milwaukee Ave.*

STYLING: PATRIC CHAUVEZ | HAIR AND MAKEUP: CAMMY KELLY/DISTINCT ARTISTS



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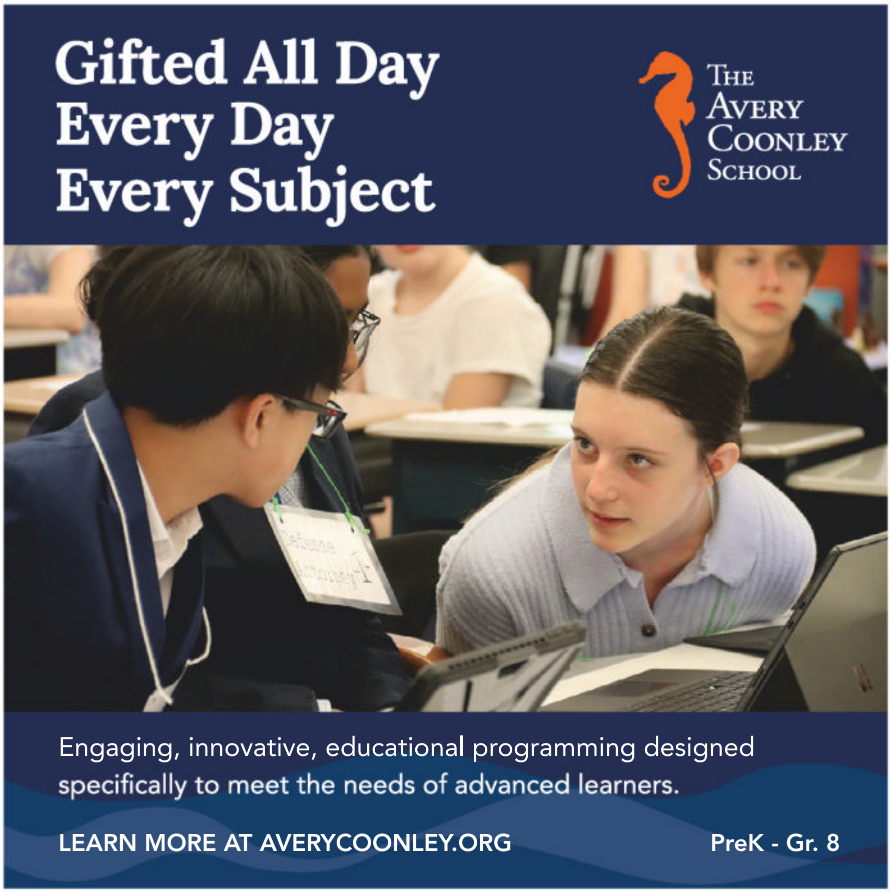

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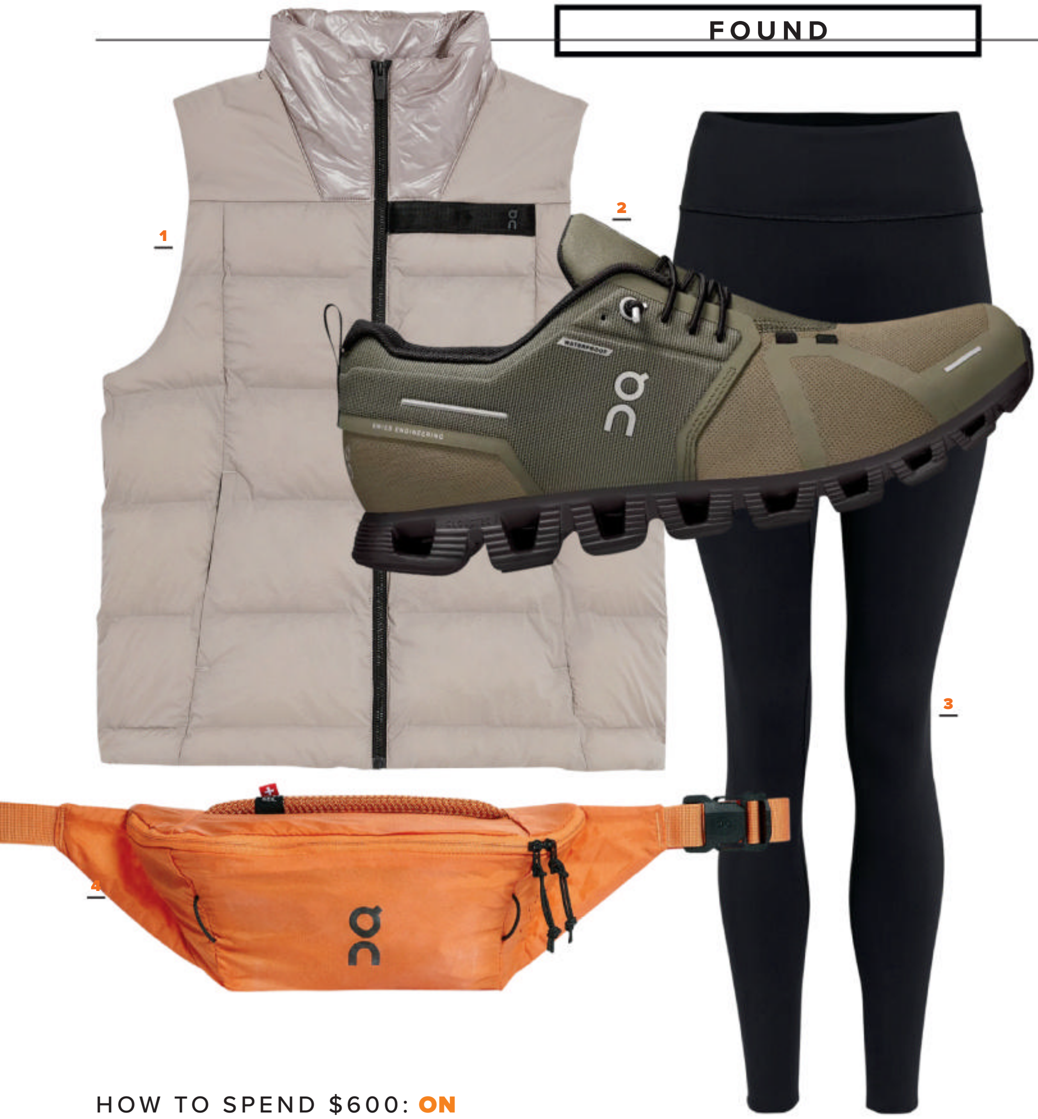
So Metal

Eric Williams brings an edgier version of The Silver Room to Michigan Avenue.

By KELLY AIGLON

The Silver Room, a clothing and accessories retail empire that Eric Williams groomed from its early days as a mom-and-pop shop in Wicker Park to a hype den in Hyde Park, continues to take experimental turns. The latest is the Silver Room Design Lab, a pop-up that will be open indefinitely in the 900 North Michigan Shops on the Mag Mile. "I'm doing more fashion and avant-garde stuff in this location," says Williams, who stocks the red-splayed boutique with wares from little-known designers like Copenhagen's Henrik Vibskov, along with local luminaires like Nick Cave and Carlos Rolón. Williams also plans to have DJs on hand and host special events. After ruminating on ways to bring community together within the mall landscape, he partnered with the architecture firm Gensler on the space: "I've learned that small projects bring the biggest changes in cities."

Photograph by NATHAN KIRKMAN



HOW TO SPEND $600: **ON**

Runner's World

A Swiss performance gear favorite that blends sleek design with sustainability opens a flagship here. By JUDY SUTTON TAYLOR

LEAVE IT TO THE SWISS TO NAIL PRECISION TIMING: Zurich-based On, the fitness brand best known for its distinctive Cloud running shoes with tube-shaped cushion soles, as well as eco-friendly materials and manufacturing, opened its first store here last fall, just before the Chicago Marathon. The 4,553-square-foot space is one of the brand's largest in the United States, with footwear, apparel, and accessories organized by mode: run, outdoor, everyday, and train. The store blends a Swiss minimalist aesthetic with an open ceiling and industrial accents that nod to Chicago's bascule bridges. Ask the staff for a complimentary gait analysis to help you pick the right shoe, each size easily accessible from pullout metal trays inside the display. And on Wednesday nights, you can join a group run to try before you buy. *1043 N. Rush St., Gold Coast*

1 Challenger puffer vest, $280
2 Cloud 5 waterproof shoes, $170
3 Core tights, $100
4 2L Lite waist pack, $50

THE ENDORSEMENT

Milwaukee's Kinnickinnic Avenue

■ Milwaukee's South Side is for more than beer slinging. The Bay View neighborhood, along South Kinnickinnic Avenue, is my holy grail of offbeat boutiques.

On a recent visit, I was tempted to get a custom topper at McLaughlin & Hayes Hat Co. (2250 S. Kinnickinnic Ave.). It's a treat to watch milliners hover over vintage wooden forms to make flower-studded cloches and teardrop fedoras.

Across the street, Tippecanoe Herbs (2235) is a homey herbalist-founded apothecary with a botanical tincture for whatever ails you (in my case, blue vervain for better sleep). Afterward, a drop-in at Acme Records (2341) to pet the shop dog, Gertie, and dig through the bargain bins never fails.

The latest zines, graphic novels, and small-press books fill Lion's Tooth (2421). I get my underground culture fix here with a cappuccino, sipped slowly at a counter barstool. Nearby, Ursa (2534) is a sunshine-dappled stop for plants and gifts like kilim pillows, hand-forged jewelry, and marbled ceramics.

Farther south, meander through Plume (3001). Seemingly staged for a cocktail party in '70s Palm Springs, it carries immaculately cared-for vintage fashion. I never miss the tucked-away upper level for resort wear à la Grace Kelly.
—KELLY AIGLON

Plume

PHOTOGRAPHY: (ON) COURTESY OF BRAND; (ENDORSEMENT) PLUME

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Jon's approach is strategic, efficient, and ensures maximum payouts for clients. He frequently resolves cases through arbitration, cutting down the time clients wait for results. His experience includes handling complex medical malpractice claims, product liability cases, and major class action lawsuits, such as suing Ticketmaster for price manipulation.

A lifelong Chicagoan, Jon is passionate about his city—its people, sports, music, and food. He and his wife Julie actively support organizations advocating for racial equality, education access, and disability rights.

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For over 18 years, attorney Lisa Weinstein has been a fierce advocate for children and families impacted by birth injuries. A mother of three, Lisa has devoted her career as a plaintiffs' lawyer to seeking justice for the most vulnerable: those who cannot speak for themselves.

Lisa is a passionate and empathetic champion for families, providing the support her clients need to take on negligent medical professionals responsible for altering their lives forever. Her clients often become like family to her—they deserve to know the truth about what happened in the delivery room and to receive the compensation they are owed.

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In her role as the Vice Chairman of Gateway for Cancer Research, Dr. Stephenson is deeply committed to fundraising for early-stage cancer trials and supporting innovative cancer research. She is at the forefront of Gateway for Cancer Research's premier Arizona philanthropic event of 2025, Vino con Stelle, which will be hosted at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess on Saturday, March 22, 2025. It will be an amazing evening of finding, funding and furthering vital cancer research designed to provide better, safer treatment options, giving patients more time, improved quality of life and the healing power of HOPE! In the fall, Gateway will host a signature gala in Chicago as well. **gatewaycr.org/vino/**

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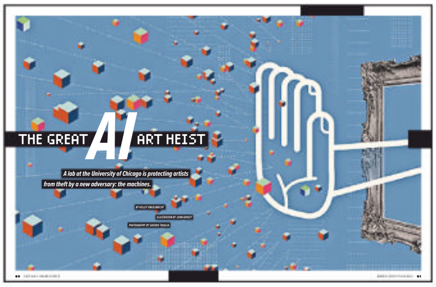
THE GREAT AI ART HEIST
A lab at the University of Chicago is protecting artists from theft by a new adversary: the machines.
BY KELLEY ENGELBRECHT
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN HERSEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAVERIO TRUGLIA
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The Great AI Art Heist

(Continued from page 69)

middle schoolers in Washington, D.C., held a bake sale to raise money for Glaze and Nightshade. For Zhao and Zheng, all support, no matter how small, is important. In the fight against giants, moments of validation, even by way of cookies and muffins, are the crumbs that keep them moving forward.

Almost immediately after Glaze was released, there was pushback. The software was anonymously added to a user-reported list of viruses and was flagged as malware whenever it was downloaded. Zhao pins it on "tech bros," but no one's really sure. There are quite a few people who are not thrilled with the lab's work. Zhao mentions that conversations at research conferences get awkward; funding for various research projects often comes from Google, Meta, and other powerful companies that are investing heavily in generative AI.

But when I ask Zheng about these adversaries – the people who don't like the way she and Zhao are disrupting things – she shakes her head, smiling. Ultimately, they don't matter to her. She points to the poster. "I'd rather see Glaze and Nightshade as a way to tell the young generation that they have agency."

IN 1917, A MAN USING THE NAME Richard Mutt notoriously submitted a porcelain urinal, thrown on its side, to the Society of Independent Artists and called it fine art. In large, drippy letters, the unknown artist signed the urinal ("R. Mutt," along with the year) and titled it *Fountain*.

There was immediate shock and confusion. That a factory-made object (a vulgar one at that) could be submitted as art in its unaltered state was cause for outrage. There was no craftsmanship, no technique. Just a urinal.

The French artist Marcel Duchamp, grinning, dripping paintbrush in hand, would eventually take credit for the work. No one really knew what "R. Mutt" meant. Duchamp would later say it was a reference to the popular comic strip *Mutt and Jeff.* Or a sly nod to the word "ready-made." Or J.L. Mott Iron Works, the factory that made the urinal. Or a play on French slang for "moneybags." In the following decades, Duchamp used that paintbrush to sign "reproductions" of *Fountain,* which made their way, with great acclaim, to galleries and museums after the original was lost.

"I thought the idea behind it was so cool," says Shan, who took an art history class so he would better understand the fundamentals for his research. The class covered the 20th century – an era characterized by the way it broke apart what was accepted as form and color, redefining what art could be. There was Kasimir Malevich and his white square on white canvas. Later Mark Rothko and his planes of color. Art that would elicit whispers of "I could do that" in museums around the world.

"But it's not the image that you see," Shan continues. "It's the human emotion. It's the feeling evoked in the audience."

When I think about art and its relationship with generative AI, I find myself caught in a loop. If art is the human idea, then wouldn't a human, typing a prompt into something like Midjourney, count as the human effort within the art making?

Or maybe the better question is, What is the correct amount of humanness that makes art art? In the summer of 2022, game designer Jason Allen won first prize for digital art in the Colorado State Fair's annual fine arts competition with his entry *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial.* Pairing realism with elements of fantasy, it's art that's difficult to describe, which is what makes it so absorbing. It's the kind of piece that you want to lose yourself in, the way all great art allows. Except it was almost entirely created with generative AI.

When Allen's entry won the competition, there was the obvious controversy – controversy that was heightened that December when his application to copyright the piece was rejected. It was AI art, the U.S. Copyright Office wrote in its decision, and since the government had already ruled that AI art lacks human authorship, it could not be protected. Even after Allen detailed how he used at least 624 text prompts and input revisions, how he manipulated the raw image in Adobe Photoshop and used Gigapixel AI to increase size and resolution, the office held fast. There was too much machine and not enough human. But if Allen had the idea, does it even matter?

In the months that followed the *Fountain*'s controversial submission, the Dadaist publication *The Blind Man* published an editorial defending it: "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object."

Perhaps this idea of ideas is only a red herring. It shifts our thinking away from the very important reality that art is being scraped, often without consent, and fed to the AI machines and models – machines and models that are backed by businesses that are very interested in making money and don't seem interested in compensating the artists from whom they're stealing. Perhaps we're fixed on the idea of ideas because wrestling with what art is and isn't almost seems easier than confronting the massive power imbalance between artist and Big Tech.

AFTER INTERVIEWING ZHAO AT THE LAB, I immediately felt the need to go look at some art. It was a Monday, so the museums were closed, but as I walked down Woodlawn Avenue, I soon passed the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, which had a giant sign for its gallery positioned at the entrance. It was before noon, the U. of C. campus quiet, and so I walked into a predictably empty building. I was pointed in the direction of a small, dark room, where I found myself sitting, quietly and alone, as a screen flashed in front of me. A video installation by the Otolith Group, *Mascon: A Massive Concentration of Black Experiential Energy*, was projected onto the wall, running in a continuous loop.

On the screen was a kaleidoscope of images, an almost collage-like mosaic of shapes, along with scenes from the films of Ousmane Sembène and Djibril Diop Mambéty, two prominent Senegalese filmmakers from the '70s. The stratification of color and sound was brilliant – a layering of ideas and movements and artists and mediums to create something singular and unique. I realized I was holding my breath as a parade of blue sliced across the frame.

Multidisciplinary pieces, like the work of the Otolith Group, have obvious differences from the artworks that Glaze and Nightshade currently protect. But that doesn't mean that Zhao, Shan, and the rest of the lab aren't already thinking about how this kind of technology can be used across other media. Dancers, composers, voice actors, writers – they've all reached out to Zhao to ask if something like Glaze could be created for their disciplines.

> ***Dancers, composers, voice actors, writers — they've all reached out to Zhao to ask if something like Glaze could be created for their disciplines.***

But it's not as simple as creating the same kind of software for other industries. Each has its own set of specific issues related to generative AI. Voice actors, for example, are trying to prevent audio of them from being used without consent (or compensation) to say literally anything in films, commercials, and other media. And I'm all too aware of the surge in AI-generated writing that has flooded the market. In each case, SAND Lab's researchers know they need to start from the beginning, asking, like they did at the CAA town hall, what each group needs.

Then the lab can look at the AI technology being used and see what opportunities present themselves. Sometimes the answer is relatively straightforward. Right now Stanley Wu, another PhD student at the lab, is looking at how the team could manipulate the vision-language model, the technology that generates descriptive text captions for images, to further confuse AI programs as they classify things. He's excited – maybe this could be a nice complement to Nightshade. (Also in the works: A combined version of Glaze and Nightshade.)

Call it vigilante justice or guerrilla tactics, but there's a sense of stalwart duty as the lab attempts to dismantle generative AI. Or at the very least, chip away at it. And it isn't just artists taking notice: Entertainment companies eager to protect their intellectual property have reached out.

This spring, Shan will begin applying for faculty positions that will likely take him elsewhere. I ask if he's worried about the career risk associated with working against big technology companies so publicly. Without missing a beat, he says no. "There's so much at stake, my personal risk is less important." Plus, there are two sides to the issue. Regulators are now looking for honest feedback about generative AI, independent from places like Meta or Microsoft or Google. Shan smiles. "There are very few technologists who are not associated with these companies."

I also get the sense that there are very few technologists who are thinking about art so intentionally, every single day. No one at the lab admits to being an artist, but it is clear that all of them deeply appreciate art and understand what's at stake.

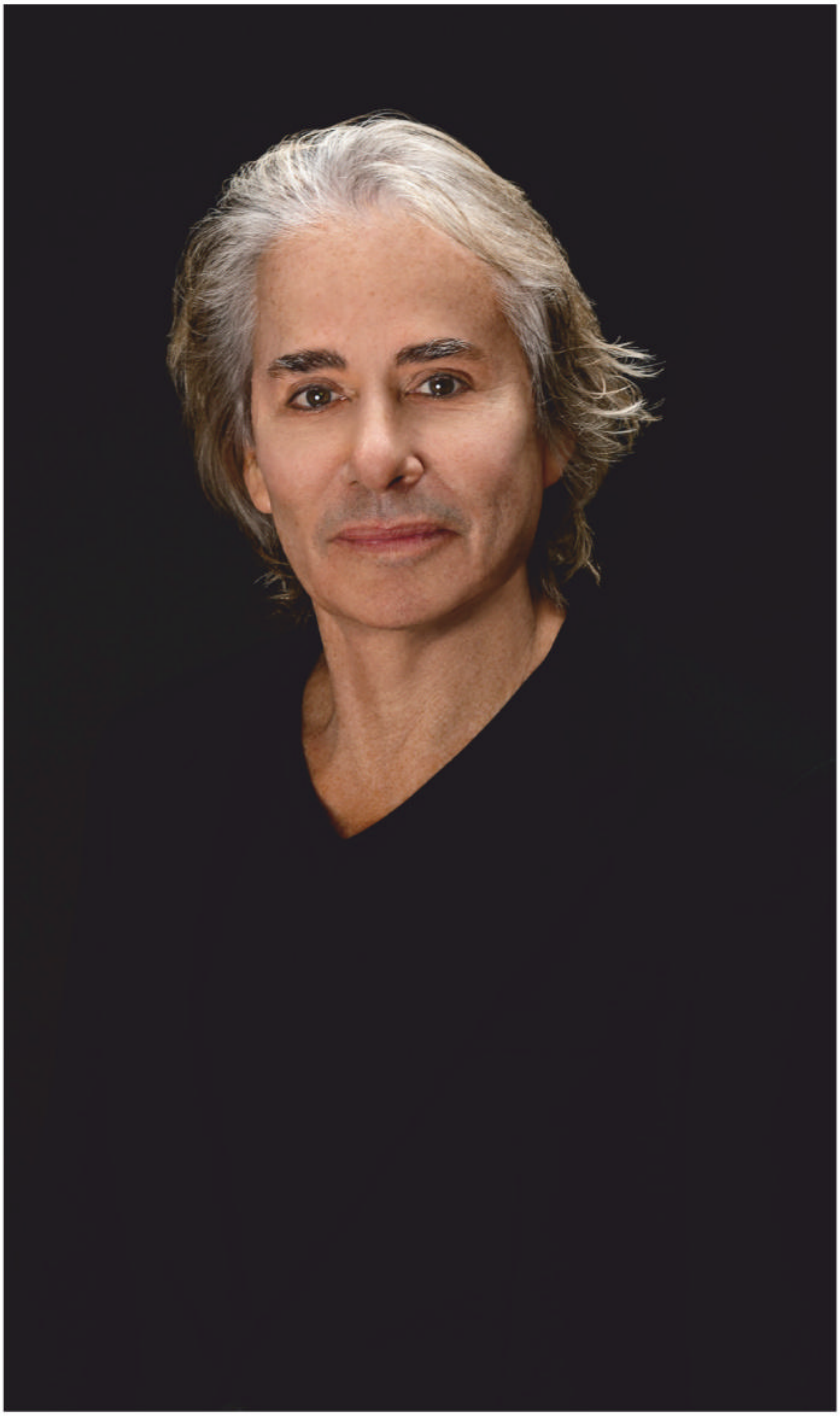
Zheng loves ink wash painting, a traditional Chinese art technique that produces beautiful black-and-white forms. She used to paint when she was younger – she was good, she told me – and finds time, whenever she returns to China, to visit a few artists still practicing the form. It's meaningful to spend time with them, to see their work. "The years of experience, life experience …" Zheng paused. "It's putting your emotion, your experience, everything into the painting. You see the painting and you can feel that."

Zhao had told me that it's nearly impossible for the average person to discern the difference between human-generated and AI-generated art. He theorizes that in the future there will be a premium on art made by humans – in part because there will be so few practicing artists. It's a world that Glaze and Nightshade aim to prevent – one where generic, cheap copies are so plentiful and human art so rare that it's more valuable than diamonds. His team is already working on ways to cryptographically prove that a work of art was created by an actual human.

Meanwhile, even as generative AI has rapidly affected Kim Van Deun's livelihood, she says she has never once regretted pursuing art as a career. This is what art does to us. Whether we make it or become its patron, it gives us a way to envision a different kind of world, a new way of expression. It gives us hope. Hope that I see as I correspond with Van Deun. She continues to illustrate, to work as an artist. She prefers to use Nightshade when she uploads her work to the internet. Of SAND Lab's two software offerings (so far), that is the one she anticipates will have the most impact. If she was the pebble that teetered on the mountaintop, perhaps Nightshade is the stone that will fell the giant.

As I make my way through the university's interconnecting quads, I notice the breeze. How the light dapples the sidewalk. Call it mindfulness, call it basic awareness, but I find myself eager to listen to the rustle of the leaves. At home, I watch my daughter empty her box of crayons. She picks up one, already worn down to a stub, and begins to scribble furiously. She pays no attention to the lines, presses down hard enough to tear the paper. There's no awareness of perfection or style, just an unadulterated love for the color pink. I know that one day she'll learn how to draw shapes. And eventually those shapes will begin to mean something. But for now, it's just messy and chaotic. It's imperfect. It's so wildly, and wonderfully, human.

Cosmetic Surgery Profiles



PHOTOGRAPH: FRANCIS SON

Body by Bloch

Steven Bloch, MD

Dr. Steven Bloch is a nationally recognized plastic surgeon with an international patient base. He has consistently been named a "top plastic surgeon." He has been a leader in introducing advanced techniques in his Center of Excellence, including most recently the Vaser 4D Hi-Definition Liposculpture.

A board-certified plastic surgeon for more than 30 years, Dr. Bloch has the skills and experience to match. He rose to prominence quickly and has been featured on CBS, Discovery Channel, FOX News Channel, NBC, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and WGN-TV Chicago, to name a few.

Dr. Bloch combines an artistic sense with a technical, scientific background to create a natural and refined look for his patients. He believes that each of us has an inner sense of how we should look, and the art of plastic surgery is to listen to each patient's desires and needs. It is important to separate reality from fantasy. After a consultation with the patient, a plan is outlined and costs are discussed. The next step is to transform these dreams, when appropriate, into reality.

Dr. Bloch does not believe that his role ends with surgery. He is actively involved in the post-operative phase and has a dedicated staff to assist patients with their needs, whether medical or emotional.

Additionally, he has a nationally recognized medical spa with state-of-the-art, spare-no-expense, cutting-edge technologies to treat the entire body. The latest technology being introduced to the Chicago area is EmFace and Cool Peel. This really works and is painless. We guarantee it. Dr. Bloch supervises these treatments at Skin Deep Medical Spa, which has locations in Highland Park and Glenview.

All injections are given by Dr. Bloch; he believes your face is too important to delegate to a non-physician. Furthermore, a firm understanding of the aging process and underlying anatomy is critical to getting it right.

To learn about new and innovative treatment options, Dr. Bloch encourages you to visit his websites at bodybybloch.com and skindeepmedicalspa.com.

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PHOTOGRAPH: FRANCIS SON

Dr. Peter D. Geldner

The Geldner Center Plastic Surgery & Med Spa

Go from ordinary to extraordinary with today's advanced cosmetic surgery and aesthetic procedures from The Geldner Center. Experience a whole new way to feel about yourself and gain a new outlook on life. Dr. Peter Geldner is a nationally recognized board-certified plastic surgeon specializing in cosmetic surgery of the face and body. He has performed surgery on thousands of satisfied patients over the past 33 years and has demonstrated the highest level of expertise in his field. The Geldner Center is committed to maximizing each patient's aesthetic goals while providing a personalized experience.

Dr. Geldner is past president of the Chicago Society of Plastic Surgeons and is considered one of the leading plastic surgeons in the Midwest. He is a perennial fixture on "best of" lists, both regionally and nationally. Dr. Geldner has been named a "Top Doctor" by *U.S. News and World Report*, Castle Connolly, the Consumers' Research Council of America, RealSelf, and *Chicago* magazine. When the media wants an expert, they talk to Dr. Geldner. He has shared his expertise on ABC, NBC, WGN, Fox Business, Fox News, the Learning Channel, Web MD Radio Live, and many other media outlets.

The Geldner Center's Chicago and western suburb locations feature nonsurgical treatments like Ultherapy, Moxi, BBL, Morpheus, CoolSculpting, Emsculpt Neo, Emtone, and Emface. Emface is a revolution in facial treatments. By admitting both synchronized RF and HIFES energies, it simultaneoulsy affects the skin and muscles. The end result is fewer wrinkles. Best of all, Emface treats the full face in only 20 minutes.

The Geldner Center also has licensed nurse injectors in both locations to meet your injectable needs as well as licensed medical aestheticians specializing in chemical peels, photo facials, laser therapy treatment, Ultherapy, Moxi, BBL, Morpheus, microneedling, skin care regimens, and more. We now offer infusion therapy to help with fatigue, anxiety, dehydration, anti-aging and more.

Together, Dr. Geldner and The Geldner Center staff can help you achieve the look you desire with the personalized care you deserve so you have the confidence to live life to the fullest.

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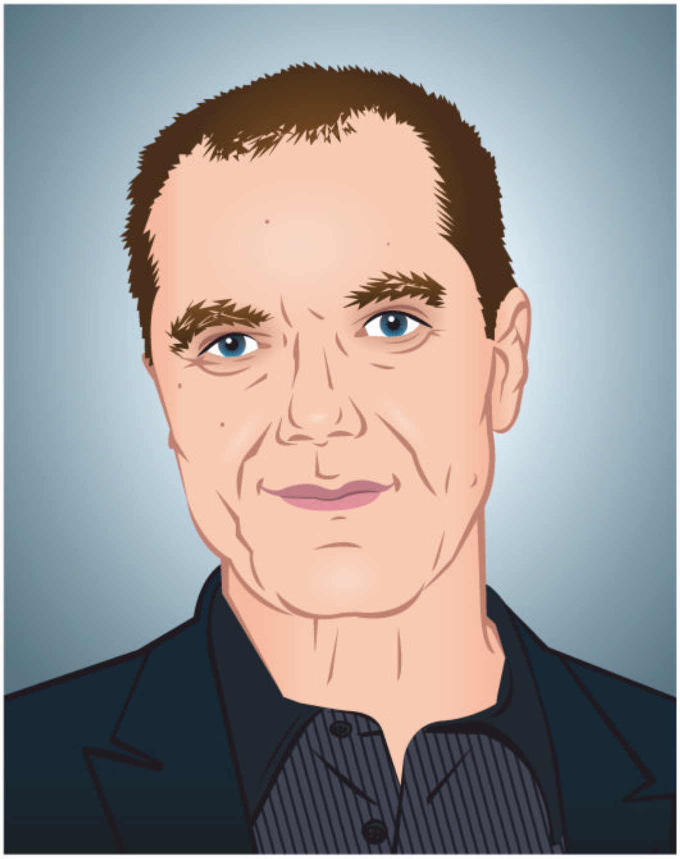

Michael Shannon

The actor, 50, on being a loner at New Trier, the brilliance of Bill Murray, and the beauty of jazz

Interview by MIKE THOMAS

■ **When I met Tracy Letts**, I was a very young non-Equity actor in Chicago. I wasn't making any money. And then he wrote these incredible plays and let me be a part of them. *Killer Joe*. *Bug*. They're huge. Frankly, without those plays, I don't know what would have happened. I don't know if I would have found my way out of Chicago.

■ **I was at New Trier my freshman and sophomore years.** Up until then, I had lived in Kentucky with my mom. So it was a massive shift from the little schools I'd been going to. I walked in and didn't know a soul. Thousands of kids. I was a real loner for a while. The kids didn't have much use for some weird dude who just appeared out of nowhere. From the time I was 12 to 16, those years were pretty arduous. I had a lot of big feelings. A lot of trauma, a lot of pain. But I liked going there because they did a lot of plays and musicals and had theater classes. I never got a big part in anything, but it's where I started messing around with acting. You put those feelings onstage and people find that compelling.

■ **I was a patron in the little diner in *Groundhog Day***, so I got to spend all this time watching Bill Murray just endlessly revising scenes and coming up with stuff out of thin air and making everybody laugh. There was just so much joy in it. It was a beautiful thing to witness. A lot of people think that the real heavy lifting in acting is being dramatic. But to elevate a room like that just on your wit is more impressive to me than sitting there sobbing.

■ **Sometimes people see me** and their initial reaction is sort of suspicion. I feel like that's because they're trying to sort out how they know me. In that moment they're perplexed, and they seem almost annoyed. Then once they figure it out, they seem pleasantly surprised. The thing I mostly hear is, "You're that actor."

■ **George Jones was just some guy I used to see on *Hee Haw*** when I was a little boy. That was the extent of my knowledge of him until doing *George & Tammy*. Such a fascinating, tragic, beautiful human being who ultimately seemed to find some redemption later in life. No matter how much of a train wreck your life might be up to a certain point, you can hit the brakes and change tracks and make something of yourself.

■ **Music is sacred to me.** A lot of times I get ready for performances, particularly onstage, by listening to it. Jazz is probably the eye of the pyramid as far as music goes. It's just so present. The people who make it, when they're improvising, they're so revealing of themselves and their struggles and their joys. It never ceases to amaze me.

■ **People consider acting to be an ego-driven profession**, but the longer you do it, the more you realize that it's really not about being in the spotlight. It's about trying to understand people. I'm not saying I'm some avatar of human behavior; I still have my own foibles. But there's an evolution that I can see from when I started doing this work till now, and that's been the journey of understanding that it's not about me. My job is to disappear. C

Illustration by QUICKHONEY

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